

*Man &  
Literature*

by

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FOR  
THE MEMBERS OF THE W.E.A.  
AT MILLOM, ST. BEES, AND  
WHITEHAVEN

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## Introduction

THIS book is not an attempt to measure modern literature by a Christian yardstick. It is not, fundamentally, *literary* criticism at all. It is rather an enquiry into the assumptions as to the nature and purpose of Man which underlie much of modern writing. In the Middle Ages, however much people might disagree about all sorts of things, they had one doctrine in common—they agreed on the whole as to the nature of Man. Since the Renaissance there have been conflicting views on this, and in our own century, in particular, few writers can assume that their readers will have this common ground to build on. Of the doctrines of Man which have developed largely since the Renaissance two are very common in modern literature—Liberal Man and Natural Man. Since the first is typified by Wells and the second by Lawrence, I have divided the writers into two successive periods for the purpose of this book—but it should clearly be understood that the “periods” are merely a convenient term. They are not to be regarded as chronological or limited in time, and they overlap and are interlinked in a complex way. As against these two pagan or romantic doctrines, I see the classical and Christian conception of Man re-emerging in literature. Obviously it has never been abandoned in Christian teaching, but it has been replaced to a great extent in popular thought by Liberal and Natural Man. It seems to me very significant, therefore, that such important writers as Eliot and Joyce, and so many of the younger men, should be reasserting a view of Man which is in strong contradiction to that held by those who have been a dominant influence in the literature of the earlier years of this century.

My obligations to other writers and critics are many. Some are acknowledged in the text, many could not be so acknowledged, and of many, probably, I am unaware. But these I would specially like to mention, adding my thanks, and a warning to the reader that the authors must not be blamed for the conclusions I may have drawn from their writings:

V. A. Demant: *The Religious Prospect*.

Jacques Maritain: *True Humanism*.

T. S. Eliot: *After Strange Gods*.

George Every, S.S.M.: *Christian Discrimination*.

S. L. Bethell: *The Literary Outlook*. . .

Edwin Muir: "Natural Man and Political Man" (an article in *New Writing and Daylight*, Summer, 1942).

I would like to express my debt to all the authors whose work I have quoted for the purpose of criticism, and also to their respective publishers. Wherever possible acknowledgments to the source of the quotation have been made in footnotes.

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# PART I

## LIBERAL MAN

### I

## *Liberal Man*

THE first of the three "periods" which we will consider is that of twentieth-century Liberalism. On the surface, this is concerned with the assertion of the rights of the individual against all institutions which try to set themselves up as of more value and importance than the human person—an idea taken in the beginning from Christianity. In various forms, often antagonistic, it provided the chief debating matter for such writers as Shaw, Wells and Galsworthy. But underneath was a more important dogma, one which was rarely debated because it was taken for granted as self-evident—the dogma of Progress, of the inevitable perfectibility of Man. To quote Canon Demant, this dogma "was a body of assumptions about the nature of man that in one way or another denied him real being or essence and thought to interpret his existence in terms of becoming, or progress, or evolution."<sup>1</sup>

In the case of the realists, Man was seen primarily as a social being, a member of a society from which he could claim rights and to which he owed duty. Freedom, in the liberal sense, was seen largely as political and economic freedom; progress as a development of a planned and prosperous economic society.

Many of the realist writers had their own very vigorous ideas on these subjects, but it is not with their professed opinions that I shall deal in this book. Rather I wish to show how their outlook and assumptions dictated the form and coloured the content of their imaginative work. An artist often reveals more of his real opinions by his style than by his arguments. It is significant that the style of these writers is prosaic, unimaginative and wordy. It is no fault to be prosaic when you are writing prose, but the prose of this time never achieves the plain matter-of-factness of Defoe, as satisfying to the palate as an oatcake. At its best, it approaches

<sup>1</sup> *The Religious Prospect*, by V. A. Demant (Muller).

the precision of a scientific textbook in defining material things. It is excellent for factual description and for argument. As argument it reaches its finest development in Shaw, the best of whose prose always has the quality of the speech of an orator who knows how to get home his points. In Shaw a fine sense of balance, antithesis and climax learned from the Bible and Bunyan is used not as ornament, but to give force to the ideas. At other times, as in the worst of Wells, this prose becomes flat, muddled and inarticulate.

## *The End of the Nineteenth Century*

DURING the second half of the nineteenth century there was a gradual abandoning of the Christian faith and of belief in the supernatural. To a certain extent this was replaced by a vague sort of pantheism for which the misunderstanding of Wordsworth had prepared the way. But the more usual attitude was that of the "earnest atheist," of which George Eliot may be taken as an example. George Eliot and the rest did not give up their belief in God, which they had learnt in childhood, because they wanted to. There was little feeling, whether illusory or not, that they were moving out into a new liberty of thought—nothing of the wild enthusiasm of the French Revolution, when a figure of Reason was enthroned in Notre Dame. The theory of Natural Selection seemed to undermine the authority of the Bible, and scientific determinism made it difficult to believe in miracles, and the whole pressure of Victorian thought forced them, reluctantly on the whole, to reject Christian doctrine. For many the change was made easy if they wanted it to be so. The spread of Unitarianism had made possible the development of a form of filleted Christianity, with the bone of dogma taken out, a form which was neither fish, flesh nor fowl. The dogma was not denied—it was simply ignored—and Christianity became at its best a moral code attributed to certain ceremonial observances, at its worst mere respectability with a special sort of social call for Sundays. At any rate, no man need stop going to church because he did not accept the Creed. Even among such people as these there occasionally arose what were solemnly called *Doubts*. Most modern readers have grinned over Lytton Strachey's account of the Doubts of Dr. Arnold of Rugby, and Rose Macaulay, in *Told by an Idiot*, tells how—

"one evening shortly before Christmas, in the days when our forefathers, being young, possessed the earth—in brief, in the year 1879—Mrs. Garden came briskly into her drawing-room from Mr. Garden's study and said in her crisp, even voice to her six

children, 'Well, my dears, I have to tell you something. Poor Papa has lost his faith again.' "

But for the more honest this way out simply would not do. These became the high-minded atheists of the day. And as the more honest were mostly those of a puritanical frame of mind, they took their puritanism with them. The moral law seemed to them so self-evident that they had no doubt that it would stand by itself without any dogma as a scaffolding. When the doctrines of the Fall and of the Redemption and of Divine Grace had been set aside it was necessary to base the moral law on the belief in the natural goodness of Man. For a while, perhaps, this seemed to work. Certainly it was not actually denied for a long time, except of course, by those who had never let go of the Christian faith. But signs that everything was not right in the human garden began to show in the literature of the time, and particularly in the novels of Thomas Hardy. Hardy, like George Eliot, rejected the dogma of Christianity, but clung on in general to its morality. When he looked about him, however, he saw that which did not seem consistent with belief in the natural 'goodness of Man—he saw pride, envy, greed, gluttony, malice, lust and sloth. As Man was by nature good, he couldn't blame Man. But by his habit of thought he had to blame someone. So he blamed God. Throughout his novels, but more especially in the later ones, there is implied a fatalism which is not pure mechanical determinism, but mechanical determinism somehow warped. Coincidences and arbitrary changes of fortune are nearly always bringers of unhappiness. Life is not only predestined; it is predestined *for the bad*. In a man who was kind and sympathetic in his character this resulted in a tragic irony which the Victorians found very acceptable. When, however, he made his attitude more explicit they were roused to protest. This occurs in the last paragraph of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Angel Clare and his sister are walking on the hills above Wintoncester after Tess had been arrested at Stonehenge. They see hoisted the black flag which means that Tess has been hanged. Then Hardy writes:

" 'Justice was done, and the President of the Immortals,' in Æschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess. And the d'Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing."



A few years later Hardy produced his most important work in verse—the long “epic-drama” of *The Dynasts*. This tells the story of the Napoleonic Wars in a sort of pageant play. It was never intended for the stage and included immense panoramas in dumb show which are capable only of “mental” performance. Perhaps the best of the poetry is contained in the prose descriptive passages, but the blank verse is always competent and often lively, and the whole work is very readable, and, at present, topical. It is the machinery of the play, however, which concerns us now. Hardy introduces as chorus a number of symbolic figures—Spirit of the Years, Chorus of the Pities, Spirit of Rumour, Spirit Ironic and so on. Their function is partly to link the scenes together and to explain the action to the audience, but they are used also to express Hardy’s interpretation of the events. He sees world history as ordered dimly by the “Immanent Will,” with human beings as puppets. The course of all battles, the outcome of all conferences are seen directed helplessly to their end by “fate.” At the end of the play, when Napoleon has been defeated at Waterloo, the choruses comment:

*“Spirit of the Pities:*

Why prompts the Will so senseless-shaped a doing?

*“Spirit of the Years:*

I have told thee that It works unwittingly,  
As one possessed, not judging.

*“Semichorus of Ironie Spirils (aerial music):*

Of Its doings if It knew,  
What It does It would not do!  
Since It knows not, what for sense  
Speeds Its spinings in the Immense?  
None; a fixed foresightless dream  
Is Its whole philosopheme.  
Just so; an unconscious planning,  
Like a potter raptly panning!”

Such a bald statement of what many people were thinking without admitting it to themselves was not palatable. They preferred a mild cynicism tempered with a wistful look back over the shoulder to the faith that was past. Hardy, indeed, expressed

this wistfulness also in at least one of his poems, the delightful "Oxen," in which he tells of his childhood belief that the oxen knelt in their stalls on Christmas Eve, and how:

"If someone said on Christmas Eve,  
'Come; see the oxen kneel  
"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb  
Our childhood used to know,'  
I should go with him in the gloom,  
Hoping it might be so."

Hardy's good sense and his clear knowledge of what he is doing save this poem from the mawkishness which is often found in the work of poets who pretend to Christian doctrines to serve their own emotions—a mawkishness which, unfortunately, often commends itself to the compilers of hymn-books.

The poets, however, who best expressed this combination of cynicism and nostalgia were Fitzgerald and, later, A. E. Housman. It is surely significant that these have been two of the most popular poets of the last fifty years. It is valuable to compare Omar Khayyám with "A Shropshire Lad." Each is set in an imaginary land.<sup>1</sup> The play of proper names in the one (Rustum, Hátim Tai) is paralleled by the use of topographical names in the other (Ludlow, Teme). Each has a simple quiet music which is managed with great technical skill. Each talks a good deal about the consolations of drink. In each there is a regretful glance at the transience of worldly glories:

"They say the Lion and the Lizard keep  
The Courts where Jamshýd gloried and drank deep:  
And Bahráw, that great Hunter—the Wild Ass  
Stamps o'er his Head, and he lies fast asleep."  
(*Rubáiyát*, XVII.)

And:

"The gale, it plies the saplings double,  
It blows so hard, 'twill soon be gone:  
To-day the Roman and his trouble  
Are ashes under Uricon."  
(*"A Shropshire Lad," XXXI.*)

<sup>1</sup> In speaking of "Omar," I refer to Fitzgerald's version—not to the original. To English readers, Persia was an imaginary land, as was Shropshire to Housman, as I shall point out later.

In each there is a continual regret for the shortness of life and its insignificance in view of the complete negation which would follow:

“One Moment in Annihilation’s Waste,  
 One Moment, of the Well of Life to taste—  
 The Stars are setting and the Caravan  
 Starts for the Dawn of Nothing—Oh, make haste!”  
 (*Rubáiyát*, XXXVIII.)

And:

“Comrade, look not on the west:  
 ’Twill have the heart out of your breast;  
 ’Twill take your thoughts and sink them far,  
 Leagues beyond the sunset bar.

“Oh lad, I fear that yon’s the sea  
 Where they fished for you and me,  
 And there, from whence we both were ta’en,  
 You and I shall drown again.”

(*Last Poems*, I.)

For all his pessimism, however, Fitzgerald’s Omar did not allow things to worry him too much. His personified abstractions and his complacency suited the Victorians very well. Even his fatalism could be interpreted in a way to give *some* consolation to the Victorian conscience:

“Oh, Thou, who didst with Pitfall and with Gin  
 Beset the Road I was to wander in,  
 Thou wilt not with Predestination round  
 Enmesh me, and impute my Fall to Sin?”

“Oh, Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,  
 And who with Eden didst devise the Snake;  
 For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man  
 Is blackened, Man’s Forgiveness give—and take!”

(*Rubáiyát*, LVII—LVIII.)

The importance of Fitzgerald’s Omar for this study is not in itself, but in its immense popularity. Omar, in pretty leather

bindings, became the accepted poet on the drawing-room table. He was read and admired, not just by the cynic and agnostic and disillusioned; he was read by those who did not seem to have a trace of pessimism in their nature.

The same thing happened to a later generation with the poetry of A. E. Housman. It has been said that the general reader enjoys "the cherry hung with snow" and "the golden broom" by Wenlock town, and ignores or even does not notice the pessimism. Certainly Housman's picture of the countryside is one which appeals easily to the casual reader—especially a townsman or week-end. He is able to evoke vivid pictures with little detail which remind one of the woodcuts on the better type of Christmas card.

"Around the huddling homesteads  
The leafless timber roars."

(*Last Poems*, XIX.)

They are just the sort of memories treasured by a man who is attracted to the countryside without being very intimate with it. Their bareness and vagueness show up, however, when compared to the accurate observation of Edward Thomas or Robert Frost or Andrew Young. It is important, too, to remember that Housman was a Worcestershire man. Except for a few visits to Shrewsbury as a boy, he had never been to Shropshire when he started on "A Shropshire Lad." He could see the hills of Shropshire from his home in Worcestershire, but the country itself was as far away as de la Mare's Arabia. The references to Shrewsbury are sometimes clear and accurate:

"High the vanes of Shrewsbury gleam  
Islanded in Severn stream;  
The bridges from the steeped crest  
Cross the water east and west"  
("A Shropshire Lad," XXVIII.)

but on the whole the topography is an illusion created by a mock dialect, and by the very skilful use of a few names, which for Housman had almost a mythological significance. Ludlow, Knighton, Abdon under Clec, Severn, Teme, Wenlock Edge, the Wrekin—around these names and a few others the imaginary county is laid out. Recently, I took Housman's verse with me to

read on a holiday in Shropshire. I found I might just as well take Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel" to read in Heaven. The Shropshire of "A Shropshire Lad" has the qualities of a dream country, and as such it is very assimilable to the town reader.

It may be that this accounts for Housman's popularity despite his pessimism. Surely it is surprising that young girls who are delighted with the experience of being alive should so often choose as their favourite poet one who tells them that life is not worth living. Yet, with the former popularity of Omar in mind, it is hard not to believe that the nostalgic regret for a lost faith was present even in the minds of those who had not consciously admitted to themselves that they had abandoned the Christian faith. For, however little it might be realised, the pessimism was the result of the inability to maintain a morality after the dogma which justified it had been rejected.

In the case of Housman the result was bitterness. Many have thought that the Shropshire poems contain a story something like that which is behind the Shakespeare sonnets—a story of a mistress betrayed by a friend—the story indeed of "Is My Team Ploughing?" ("A Shropshire Lad," XXVII). But Grant Richards, in his memoir of Housman, denies that the poet had any disappointment in his youth other than his failure in Greats. Whatever may be the case, Housman constructs for himself a mythology of lovers who were unfaithful, young men who died, soldiers who got killed, and sailors who were drowned.

"Some lads get hung and some get shot;  
Oh woeful is our human lot,"

says Ezra Pound in a parody, and there is no doubt that the parody is justified. The vision of half the farm-labourers slitting each other's throats and being hanged in the jails of various county towns becomes, at times, comic.

"On moonlit heath and lonesome bank  
The sheep beside me graze;  
And yon the gallows used to clank  
Fast by the four cross ways"  
("A Shropshire Lad," IX.)

says Housman, and the gothic beauty of the scene makes us forget to wonder whether gallows were really as common as he says. But when he goes on to emphasise his point in more everyday light: "They hang us now in Shrewsbury jail"—the effort is too much and we have to laugh. There are times, however, when Housman's grief takes on real dignity, in particular when he is thinking of others and not indulging in self-pity. For instance, there is a poem in which a cold night reminds him how Dick used to feel the cold, who now

"Has woven a winter robe,  
And made of earth and sea  
His overcoat for ever,  
And wears the turning globe."

(*Last Poems*, XX.)

Yet in the poem which follows this in *Last Poems*, Housman lets his pessimism indulge in the cheap sneer of the casual cynic:

"The candles burn their sockets,  
The blinds let through the day,  
The young man feels his pockets  
And wonders what's to pay."

But on the whole Housman's lament for faithless women and dead men rings true enough. They may never attain the universal sweep of the tragic, but they do express a genuine grief. We may not feel, as we do with Lear, that here is the fate of Man, but we do feel sorry for Housman.

In so far as Housman allowed a personal disappointment to colour his view of life his poetry is distorting, but there is evidence that, like Hardy, he was perplexed because a belief in the natural goodness of Man was contradicted by his observations on every side. And like Hardy he looked round to find somewhere to put the blame. Throughout the poems there is a feeling that the indifference of Nature to human suffering is not just neutral—it is in some sense malignant; that the extraordinary likelihood of death by hanging for lads who stay at home or death by drowning for lads who go abroad is not just chance, it is in some way intentional. Here and there this becomes more explicit:

“And how am I to face the odds  
Of man’s bedevilment and God’s?”

(*Last Poems*, XII.)

And in the “Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries” he seems to imply that God is to blame for the Four Years’ War:

“What God abandoned, these defended,  
And saved the sum of things for pay.”

(*Last Poems*, XXXVII.)

Here the idea that God is the nigger in the woodpile is worked out with a vengeance! Man has to try to put right God’s mistake—Man is better than God.

## Shaw

MR. BERNARD SHAW may be taken as a representative figure of this period, in spite of the fact that he is by no means typical, partly because he is so much better a writer than most of his fellows, and partly because he is so much more entertaining as a personality. His best work does not bore us yet, as do the works of Galsworthy and the plays of Granville Barker, so that through him we can study the period without dullness. In Shaw, too, we find most of the characteristics of the time. They may be exaggerated in him, or made grotesque, but for those very reasons it is easier to notice them. Shaw seems to walk into a typical stage setting of the time, to pick up a pot-dog from the mantelpiece, turn it upside down and place it in the middle of the table. We must be careful to remember that it *is* upside down and that it should not be on the table at all, but at least we do see that it is there.

There is a story of a newspaper which ran a series of articles on the twelve "greatest" men or women alive at the time. They wanted Shaw's opinion, and sent a reporter to ask him which twelve men or women he would choose to save if he were Noah and there were going to be a second flood. "I'd let them all drown," Shaw replied. This is probably no more authentic than most of the stories which were told about Shaw, when such stories were popular, but it is a useful caricature of the attitude of the time to the value of human life. As Noah, Shaw would be concerned not with the moral obligation to save whom he could, but with the question as to whether it would benefit the community to save them. It is typical of the Shavian wit that in this story he decides that none of them were worth saving from the point of view of the human race. We expect that from Shaw and we do not in the least mind. The interest, however, is not in Shaw's answer to the moral question which he asks himself, but in the form of the question. Throughout his life he has demanded that the individual should give back to society the equivalent value which he takes out of it, or, in economic terms, should produce as much as he consumes. He argues that the popular



conception of a gentleman is of a man who takes everything from society and gives nothing in return, while *his* definition of a gentleman is of a man who puts into society more than he takes out. If a man is useless to society he has no reason to be allowed to live, and, in a more recent phrase, he should be "liquidated." (He is careful to point out, of course, that artists and musicians, and especially dramatists, must be regarded as contributing their due to society.) Following this line of thought, he decides that many distinguished people have failed to justify their existence.

In one of his later plays, *A Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*, he develops the idea very amusingly. An angel arrives on the earth to announce the Day of Judgment. It is not at all the sort of Doomsday people had anticipated: there is no fire, no hail, no storms, none of the signs of the Apocalypse. Indeed, the angel explains, the Day of Judgment is not the end of the world, but the beginning. "The lives which have no use, no meaning, no purpose, will fade out. You will have to justify your existence or perish. Only the elect shall survive." This is so unlike what had been expected that most people are incredulous. The British Cabinet is incensed at the idea that it should be judged by heavenly subordinates instead of by direct divine authority. There is a scene in the House of Commons in which the second verse of the National Anthem was interrupted by an angel who asked, "What they meant by ordering God about to do their dirty political work." A cherub appears, tweaks the Lord Mayor's nose, and pours ink into the Prime Minister's hat. (This pantomime element always indicates that Shaw is more than usually serious about what he has to say.) Then the judgment begins to work. One of the characters listens to the reports by telephone and repeats them to the others:

"Extraordinary disappearances. Indescribable panic. Stock Exchange closes: only two members left. House of Commons decimated: only fourteen Members to be found: none of Cabinet rank. House of Lords still musters fifty members; but not one of them has ever attended a meeting of the Chamber. Mayfair a desert: six hotels left without a single guest. Fresh disappearances. Crowded intercession service at Westminster Abbey brought to a close by the disappearance of the congregation at such a rate that the rest fled, leaving the dean preaching to the choir. At the Royal

Institution Sir Ruthless Bonehead, Egregious Professor of Mechanistic Biology to the Rockefeller Foundation, drew a crowded audience to hear his address on 'Whither have they gone?' He disappeared as he opened his mouth to speak. . . . A situation of terrible suspense has been created everywhere. Happy husbands and fathers disappear from the family dinner with the soup. Several popular leaders of fashion and famous beauties, after ringing their bells for their maids, have been found non-existent when the bells were answered. More than a million persons have disappeared in the act of reading novels. *The Morning Post* contains an eloquent protest by Lady Gushing, President of the Titled Ladies' League of Social Service, on the inequality of sacrifice as between the west end and the east, where casualties have been comparatively few. Lady Gushing has since disappeared."

And so the Judgment goes on. It is rather laboured, and the individual disappearances are not nearly so farcical and ironic as they would have been had Shaw written the play at the time of *Androcles and the Lion* or *The Doctor's Dilemma*. But the fun is still there and the argument is that which he has held consistently for fifty years or more. It is interesting to notice one or two details which show some minor changes in Shaw's outlook during that time. The Church gets little satire—the dean and the choir are left when the congregation disappear, and, in a passage not quoted, we are told that "the clergy are comparatively immune." On the other hand, the scientists come in for special satire. Shaw realises that it is Science now and not Religion which receives the unreasoning credulity of the people.

Shaw's early interest in socialism made it inevitable that his concern with the justification of the place of the individual in society should express itself most frequently in economic terms. His first play, *Widowers' Houses*, tells of a young man of socialist views who finds that his income is derived from the rents of a slum property. His third play, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, is about a girl who discovers that her mother's income comes from a chain of brothels. Again and again this attitude crops up—to say that a man is useless is the worst Shaw can find to say about him. And at times, as he grew older, he had moments of thinking that all men were useless. In *Too True to be Good*, the Patient asks bitterly:

"*Patient*: What are we, we three glorious adventurers? Just three inefficient fertilisers.

"*Aubrey*: What on earth do you mean by that?

"*Patient*: Yes: inefficient fertilisers. We do nothing but convert good food into bad manure. We are walking factories of bad manure: that's what we are."

In these words there is a hint that not only has the individual to pay his due to society, but that Man himself has to pay his due to Nature. No dramatist, not even Shaw, should be held responsible for the words of his characters, but in this study I am concerned less with Shaw's expressed beliefs than with those which were implied, perhaps unconsciously, in the shaping of the plays. And here, however grotesquely, we get a hint of an idea which was rare in the thought of the time—that Man owed a duty to Nature—in other words, the old sacramental view of the land.

Points of view, assumptions and prejudices left over from Christianity, are continually cropping up in Shaw. Unlike the comic example just quoted, they are usually from puritanism. He has the Puritan's suspicion of natural beauty, and the Puritan's belief in direct access to God, through the will and the intellect. That he doesn't believe in God very definitely didn't seem to him to matter a great deal. But he is a Puritan not only in the negative sense of the word, he is an Evangelical, ready to burn with zeal, but unable to find anything to burn for. This side of his nature is so ineradicable that it keeps bursting out, however much it contradicts his professed beliefs. Shaw believes in conversion. He has fervour, confidence, lack of respect for the superficial aspects of tradition and a readiness to translate his beliefs into everyday experience. In short he has the qualities which might have gone to a typical Moody and Sankey revivalist or a captain in the Salvation Army.

His dramatic genius made a very wise choice, therefore, when he used the Salvation Army as a setting for *Major Barbara*. His reasons may have been several. Perhaps, in part of his mind, he was mildly mocking the Salvation Army; perhaps he wanted to contrast the sincerity of the Salvationists with the pretences of fashionable life; no doubt he wanted also to emphasise his favourite theme of the relation between Christian humanism

and socialism. But the greatest artist chooses better than he knows, or chooses without knowing. The argument of the play may be muddled, but the Salvationist scenes are splendidly alive.

Bill, the tough, has slapped the face of one of the girls at the Salvation Army Hostel, and now Major Barbara is prodding his conscience:

*"Bill: Woy cawn't you lea me alown? Wot ev I dan to you? Aw ain't smashed your fice, ev Aw!*

*"Barbara (softly: wooing his soul): It's not me that's getting at you, Bill.*

*"Bill: Oo else is it?*

*"Barbara: Somebody that doesn't intend you to smash women's faces, I suppose. Somebody or something that wants to make a man of you.*

*"Bill (blustering): Mike a menn o me! Aint Aw a menn! Oo sez Aw'm not a menn?*

*"Barbara: There's a man in you somewhere, I suppose. But why did he let you hit poor little Jenny Hill? That wasn't very manly of him, was it?*

*"Bill (tormented): Ev dan wiv it, Aw tell you. Chack it. Aw'm sick o your Jenny Ill and her silly little fice.*

*"Barbara: Then why do you keep thinking about it? Why does it keep coming up against you in your mind? You're not getting converted, are you?*

*"Bill (with conviction): Not me. Not lawkly!*

*"Barbara: That's right, Bill. Hold out against it. Put out your strength. Don't let's get you cheap. Todger Fairmile said, he wrestled for three nights against his salvation harder than he ever wrestled with the Jap at the music-hall. He gave in to the Jap when his arm was going to break. But he didn't give in to his salvation until his heart was going to break. Perhaps you'll escape that. You haven't any heart, have you?*

*"Bill: Wot d'ye mean? Woy ain't Aw got a awt sime as ennybody else?*

*"Barbara: A man with a heart wouldn't have bashed poor little Jenny's face, would he?*

*"Bill (almost crying): Ow, will you lea me alown? Ev Aw ever offered to meddle with you, that you cam negging and provowkin me lawk this?"*

Of course, we sympathise with Bill. Major Barbara is indulging in a habit common to other Shavian women (Candida, Lady Cicely Waynflete, etc.), the habit of taking men to pieces with a pin. She is doing it, moreover, in such a school-marmish and self-righteous manner that we wouldn't mind if Bill gave her an answer on the jaw with her own tambourine. If we have ever been to a revivalist mission in our youth we have heard all her arguments, less skilfully managed, perhaps, but more sincerely. But we know what Bill is going through. His reactions are genuine enough.

Not so moving as this, but even more brilliantly in the Moody and Sankey tradition, is the little scene in which Todger Fairmile tells his street audience of his conversion.

This scene does not occur in the play (though it is implied in a speech of Barbara's quoted above), but was written for the film version. Here Todger Fairmile describes in boxing terms his struggle with his conscience, and then proceeds to "convert" Bill by brute force—a parallel to the remarkable evangelistic gifts of the giant Ferrovias in *Androcles and the Lion*.

The conversion of Bill does not come off, owing to the Army's capitulation to the forces represented by Undershaft, the armament manufacturer, and Bodger, the distiller, but in *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet* Shaw puts a conversion on the stage. The story is one he had used before, also, oddly enough, with an American setting, in *The Devil's Disciple*. This play is about a man whose wild habits have shocked his family and neighbourhood, but who, when the time of testing comes, finds that at heart he is a man of contemplation, and is ready to give up his life to save another. His counterpart, Minister Anderson, at the same time of testing finds himself at heart a man of action despite his profession. These two characters, each ready to usurp the other's role, may represent the struggle between the two sides of Shaw's own nature. Indeed, characters such as these who are at the same time men (or women) of action and contemplation are common in Shaw's work—Cæsar, Brassbound, Napoleon, Tanner, even Joan. Part of the popularity of the play, however, may be due to the way in which it illustrates that there's some good in the worst of us, a thesis which often has an almost sentimental attraction for satirists. Fielding, for instance, continually uses it, as when Joseph Andrews, who has been robbed and stripped, refused to enter a

coach until he was properly clad, and, as none of the passengers would lead him to a garment, would have been left behind—

“unless the postillion, (a lad who hath been since transported for robbing a hen-roost) had voluntarily stripped off a greatcoat, his only garment, at the same time swearing a great oath (for which he was rebuked by all the passengers), ‘that he would rather ride in his shirt all his life than suffer a fellow-creature to lie in so miserable a condition.’ ”

This paradox, that the most generous impulses are to be found in moral outcasts, is one which is often present in Shaw, who, however, if he had written the passage just quoted, would have given us the phrases in brackets first.

*The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet* is mainly a re-hash of *The Devil's Disciple*. It is, of course, not nearly so good a play, being crude, melodramatic and patchy. The crudity and the melodrama are partly intentional, but they fail in their purpose, which is to create the atmosphere of the Wild West. In spite of this, the play illustrates my point better than *The Devil's Disciple*. The story is of Blanco Posnet, a ruffian with a strain of Shavian puritanism in him—although we are told that he has “the fire of incipient delirium tremens” in his eye, he is obviously no drunkard, unlike his sanctimonious brother, the Elder Daniels. Despite the puritanism and the (perhaps repressed!) tendency to teetotalism, he has stolen a horse. He would have got away with the horse, but he came across a woman with a child, and the child had croup. In a moment of sudden pity, he had given the horse to the woman so that she should take the child to hospital. And so, with no horse to escape on, he was captured and is likely to be hanged. In the courtroom where the play is set, Blanco now blasphemes against God, who, he says, had planned it all to trick him:

“That’s how He caught me and put my neck in the halter. To spite me because I had no use for Him—because I lived my life in my own way, and would have no truck with His ‘Don’t do this,’ and ‘You mustn’t do that,’ and ‘You’ll go to Hell if you do the other.’ ”

He continues in words which are a curious inverted form of *The Hound of Heaven*:

"He meant to pay off old scores by bringing me here. He means to win the deal and you can't stop Him. Well, He's made a fool of me; but He can't frighten me. I'm not going to beg off."

The Lord Chamberlain banned the play for this, though Shaw is only putting rather crudely the point of view for which A. E. Housman was offered the Order of Merit. In any case, it's easy to see that Shaw has something else up his sleeve.

The woman to whom Blanco had given the horse is brought in, and to save his life denies that he is the man. But the court are determined to have their hanging. Feemy, a prostitute, has seen Blanco on the horse. She is eager to get a chance to convict him, because he has insulted her, but at the moment of giving evidence, she thinks of the child with the croup, has a change of heart and tells a lie to save Blanco's life. The Sheriff, who also has a change of heart, acquits the prisoner, and Blanco realises that the choice he made when he met the woman and the child was the right choice. He jumps on the table and preaches a sermon.

"Why did I go soft myself? Why did the Sheriff go soft? Why did Feemy go soft? What's this game that upsets our game? For it seems to me that there's two games bein played. Our game is a rotten game that makes me feel I'm dirt and that you're all rotten dirt as me. T'other game may be a silly game; but it ain't rotten. When the Sheriff played it he stopped being rotten. When Feemy played it the paint nearly dropped off her face. When I played it I cursed myself for a fool; but I lost the rotten feeling all the same."

Blanco then goes on to connect this other game with the Life Force:

"It was early days when He made the croup, I guess. It was the best He could think of then; but when it turned out wrong on His hands He made you and me to fight the croup for Him."

Here Shaw forces his own words far too obviously into Blanco's mouth, and makes the character unconvincing. Yet so far as Shaw had any religion it was the religion of the Life Force. The evangelism of *Major Barbara* and *Blanco Posnet* is a morality which is not religious at all. It will be more convenient to deal with Shaw's

religion of the Life Force in the chapter on H. G. Wells, and, for the moment, I wish to remark only on the contrast between Blanco as an evangelist and as a creative evolutionist. As an evangelist he is an entertaining and sincere comedian; as a creative evolutionist he is a boring puppet.

We cannot really take Shaw seriously when he asks us to believe that conversion is the response of an individual to the will of the Life Force. The force which took thousands of centuries to discover that croup was a mistake can hardly be expected to work so quickly on Blanco that he gives up his heart like a man at a street mission. Yet what else is it in response to? It is obvious that it is in response to something. Shaw's converts do not gravely accept the self-evidence of the moral law like George Eliot, they roll about, spilling over with the Spirit, turning capers like Holy Jumpers of the intellect. Yet Shaw is obviously anxious to avoid definition of that which, on account of the plot or setting of the play, he has to make some of his characters call God. When Blanco talks in his own terms of the obligation to obey the Moral Law, it is not the Moral Law which he calls God (or Him) he does not really recognise the Moral Law; it is the *obligation* which he calls God. Indeed, at times, Shaw's conversions and martyrdoms look dangerously like spiritual sensations indulged in for their own sake.

In *Androcles and the Lion*, Lavinia, a beautiful Christian girl, is to be thrown to the lions. The Christian martyrs are a strange lot. They differ widely in their apparent beliefs, but they all have the cheerfulness of the Saved. (The Saved are always very cheerful in Shaw. Can it be that the masters and ministers of the Wesleyan Connexional School, to which he went as a boy, were not so dull after all?) Only one, Spintho, is a miserable creature, anxious to blackmail his way to Heaven by a martyrdom. At the last minute his courage fails, and he bolts for safety. Unfortunately, he meets an escaped lion and is eaten. A Roman Captain, who is trying to persuade Lavinia to save herself by making a token sacrifice to the gods, laughs at the story.

"*Lavinia*: Then you don't understand what that meant?

"*The Captain*: It meant that the lion had a cur for his breakfast!

"*Lavinia*: It meant more than that, Captain. It meant that a man cannot die for a story and a dream. None of us believed the



stories and the dreams more devoutly than poor Spintho; but he could not face the great reality. What you would have called my faith has been oozing away minute by minute whilst I've been sitting here, with death coming nearer and nearer, with reality becoming realler and realler, with stories and dreams fading away into nothing.

*"The Captain:* Are you then going to die for nothing?

*"Lavinia:* Yes, for that is the wonderful thing. It is since all the stories and dreams have gone that I have now no doubt at all that I must die for something greater than dreams or stories.

*"The Captain:* But for what?

*"Lavinia:* I don't know."

Something of the same "modernist" attitude is also to be found in *St. Joan*. Obviously, it was necessary that Joan should be allowed to believe in God, and to subscribe to the Catholic faith. Joan, in Shaw's play, is a very likeable tomboy, with common sense, honesty, courage and superb confidence. Many of the miracles which were claimed for her are explained by Shaw as mere exercises of common sense in the face of stupidity or superstition. But he does make the wind change for her in the Kingfisher scene, and, on her own account, he gives her her voices:

*"Joan:* I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God.

*"Robert:* They come from your imagination.

*"Joan:* Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us."

Shaw's Joan does not seem to be speaking out of character when she says this, but a real Joan who had no more faith in her voices than this would never have got half a dozen soldiers to follow her leadership.

This strain of evangelism in Shaw, a remainder of the faith of a former age, gives to the characters and the plots of his stories a significance which is lacking in the works of his contemporaries. Theoretically, he believed that Man had purpose and meaning in his behaviour only in relation to society. (His other belief that Man was to be regarded only as a transitional stage in the process of evolution will be considered later.) But his nature caused him continually to create characters who act in relation to a duty which is not obviously economic or social. Lavinia and Joan die

for "God"; Dick Dudgeon (*The Devil's Disciple*) and Blanco Posnet risk their lives to save another's life; King Magnus (*The Apple Cart*) outwits his government for the sake of his subjects; Major Barbara puts aside a comfortable way of life to work among the poor; Undershaft feels bound to the Undershaft tradition that the factory must be owned by a foundling; Ridgeon (a case in reverse) betrays his profession for the sake of a woman whom in the end he cannot marry. In every case the audience is concerned, not only with the sequence of events, the "way things turn out," but with the reaction of particular characters each to his own obligation. The obligation is by no means always conventional—it often seems mad to the other characters, and strange, even inexplicable, to the audience, but it gives a strength to the characters, and a meaning to their actions. The audience is not just an interested spectator watching which way the cat jumps.

Shaw has preached the economic interpretation of man as hard as anyone of his time. He accepts a materialist set of values, and has tried even to justify art and literature, etc., on utilitarian grounds. But within him there is always a potential General of the Salvation Army, who beats his drum at the most unexpected moments. He made hay of Shaw's arguments, but he gave vitality to his plays.

For all this, Shaw is a man of his time, and social questions take the central place in his thought. The sense of duty which his characters show is always strongest when the problem has social significance. Even in most of the cases I have just quoted the questions involved are connected with social, political or economic problems. Lavinia's martyrdom is seen as a protest against the Roman tyranny (a point which Shaw underlines in his Epilogue). Joan's job had been to drive the English out of France and restore the French as a nation—her defence at the trial is a denial that this was not a divinely appointed task. The saving of another's life, as done by Dudgeon and Posnet, is obviously an act intended to benefit society. Magnus interferes to prevent a distortion of democratic method. Barbara Undershaft sees the Salvation Army primarily as a charitable institution. Behaviour which does not seem to affect society, behaviour which does not concern other people, is of no great interest to Shaw, in spite of his saints and martyrs. Sexual morality, for instance, scarcely worries him at all. It is typical of the materialist age that sex became of less imagina-

tive interest for writers. They did not think it mattered enough to bother about. It was not just repressed, or kept out of the conversation—compare *Jane Eyre* with *Mr. Polly*—it did not seem to have enough significance to justify the attention of a serious novelist or dramatist. Nowhere in Shaw does the problem of sexual behaviour take a central place—except in *Man and Superman*, where in the first act it is brought in so that Tanner may shock the elder characters, and in the last act it is used for a comic demonstration of the Life Force moving in a mysterious way its wonders to perform. In those few plays where a love affair is the main theme this is usually (as in *Candida* and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*) so that Shaw may bring one of his Ellen Terry-like women to twist men around their fingers. The fault of Mrs. Warren was not that she had been a prostitute, but that she had made money out of it.

It was not until such writers as Lawrence and Joyce came on the scene that sex was considered sufficiently important in the literature of the time to be a matter for morals at all. I am not going to argue that the sexual morality of Lawrence or Joyce (in particular that of Lawrence) is the same as Christian morality, but it is certainly much nearer Christian than the indifference of Shaw, Galsworthy and Wells.

It must be allowed of Shaw, however, that he did not at the same time both deny the importance of sex and fill his books with it, as such later writers as Richard Aldington have done. He never wasted his time by writing of what to him did not seem to matter, and as a result his characters never have the purposelessness which is so noticeable in much modern fiction.

## *Galsworthy and the Realist Drama*

AN attitude which was more typical of the materialist and realist movement as a whole is to be found in the work of John Galsworthy. In his novels, particularly in the Forsyte series, Galsworthy sets out to give a picture of a certain stratum of society, the upper middle class, over a period from about 1880 to the time which followed the Four Years' War. His primary concern, as in all the writers of his group, was with society and with the relationship of the individual to society. The aspect of society which he chose to write about (in his novels, at any rate) limited him, so that many of the social problems which take a main part in the work of his contemporaries are seen only as disturbances outside the vision of the reader.

Within the limits he has set himself, Galsworthy successfully pursued the aims of the realist movement. His picture of the upper middle class in its glory and its slow decay is accurate, detailed and painstaking and deserves to endure as an important social record. Galsworthy was particularly well equipped to write of this class. On the one hand, he realised the fallacy behind the economic system which had raised it to its position in Victorian society, and he was able to criticise and point out the deficiencies and anomalies in the lives of the Forsytes. On the other hand, he had an admiration for the old-fashioned virtues of the Forsytes, and for their way of life. His account of the older Forsytes is therefore both satirical and sympathetic. Indeed, there is a nostalgic charm about his picture of large suburban houses at the end of the nineteenth century, with gaslight and conservatories, lace and hansom cabs. Galsworthy is successful in drawing characters almost as solid as the Victorian furniture in which they sat. When he tries to create characters of a different type, characters who live by imaginative rather than materialist values, he fails. Much literary skill is spent on the presentation of Irene, who is intended to represent the poetic side of human nature which is missing in the business-like Forsytes. But she never comes to life. She is a wraith, a mirage, seen through the eyes of others, and though, at

the beginning, Galsworthy plays for our sympathy for her against Soames, at the end we feel that in Fleur she got such a successor as she deserved.

The older characters are seen, naturally enough, in the frame of the generally-accepted standard of morals of that time. They live up to this standard, or fail to, but in either case their actions have significance and point. The morality provides a dimension by which we can work out their places in the picture. But as we read through the six volumes of the Forsyte history, we find that the younger members of the family begin to lead a life which has no standards and no significance. By showing their lives in relation to the standards which their parents and elders had held, Galsworthy is able to imply a rather sentimental judgment. But as he himself did not truly accept those standards—he rather looked back to them, nostalgically—the result is not very convincing. Indeed, we feel that Galsworthy knew that the lives of his characters were purposeless and meaningless. We feel that somehow the characters themselves knew this. And in the end we feel that their actions are not important enough to read about.

In his plays Galsworthy approached nearer to the general aim to present a complete picture of man in relation to society. His plays, indeed, are dramatised theses—not so much argument, however, but what is known as “reportage.” They are Mass Observation reports on a small scale, revealing the reactions to a given circumstance of people at varying levels of society. His peculiar trick was to present two similar events and their representatives among the people of two different classes. In *The Silver Box* a young gentleman and a charwoman’s husband are both involved in the theft of a silver box. The case is smuggled over for the gentleman, but the charwoman’s husband gets a month with hard labour. Another form of the same device is to present one event and give its reactions on two sets of characters. In *Strife*, for instance, we see a strike in a coalmine from the point of view of both the owners and the men. This method was evolved for the precise purpose of giving a documentary picture of any particular aspect of modern society which had interested Galsworthy. Later on he became fascinated with the method for its own sake and produced several plays which have hardly enough “argument” in them to justify such a method. *Escape* shows the adventures of an escaping prisoner among various groups of people—a lady in

her bedroom,<sup>1</sup> a country gentleman, a couple of maiden ladies, a parson, and so on. A preliminary scene gets our sympathy for the escaping man, and after that you would expect the interest to follow his film-like adventures. Actually, the interest is not so much in the fate of the convict, as in the reactions of the various people he meets. In *The Roof*, his last play, Galsworthy shows, story by story, from the ground floor up, the reaction of people in a hotel to a fire which starts in the basement and gradually climbs up the building. The play fails because the scenes were linked together only by a sort of prolonged accident, and also because you could not feel that Galsworthy was really interested in his characters, but had merely put the wretched people there to see what they would do. Even in his more successful plays, interest in his characters as people is always subordinate to the social "problem" with which he is concerned. The characters are real enough for their purpose, and they do claim our sympathy, but we feel too often that the dramatist uses them like litmus paper to test the acidity of affairs. But they are not puppets, jerked entirely by the workings of the plot, for Galsworthy gave them an inner core of obligation which made their actions significant within the bounds of the play. This obligation was not that of conventional morality or of any other morality, but the obligation laid upon the individual by his loyalties—loyalties to class, or race or profession. Some of the most effective situations in his plays show the clash between opposing loyalties. It may seem that Galsworthy is simply explaining the cohesion of the various patterns of society by presupposing a sort of moral law of gravity, which draws the parts together. But he realises that these loyalties are often set up by individuals in response to some inner need rather than because of actual pressure of society. The loyalties of the individual are often *in excess* of the demands of his own class or race or profession. In the play which he calls *Loyalties*, a young Jew accuses an ex-officer of stealing some money. Dancy, the accused, is anxious to say little about the matter, but his friends have such faith in him that they force him to sue the Jew for slander, and in the course of proceedings it becomes clear that Dancy is indeed guilty. He shoots himself—driven to do so by the loyalty of his friends. In the coal strike of *Strife*, on each of the two

<sup>1</sup> This scene is curiously like the opening of *Arms and the Man*, with the wit and sparkle left out.

sides in the dispute there is a man of character, determination and honesty—Anthony, the Chairman of the Directors, and Roberts, the trade-union leader. Each is convinced of the justice of his cause, neither will give way an inch. Each is inspired by fanatical loyalty for his own side, neither is getting any personal gain, and between them they prolong the strike which threatens to bankrupt the shareholders and starve the miners and their families. In the end each is repudiated by his own side, and the strike is settled by the owners, without their Chairman, and the men, without their leader.

✓ Despite his limitations, Galsworthy was probably the most successful writer of realist drama in England—Shaw, of course, was never a realist, but used realism, like Dickens, only to build up his personal fantasy. If Galsworthy is compared with Ibsen, it is obvious that he lacks many of the qualities which make a dramatist of the first class—poetry, and a real sense of character, of drama and of any true significance in life. But his plays are neat, and present their “problem” directly and precisely, and are therefore more dramatically effective than the work of those men such as Granville Barker, who followed more closely in the pattern laid down by Ibsen. Galsworthy’s plays were particularly welcome to the repertory movement, and to the large number of amateur dramatic societies which arose to perform the new drama. The members of these societies had neither the ability nor the wish to “act” in the old sense of the word; they wished rather to produce on the stage a careful imitation of everyday life. Acting became the impersonation of a given character. The everyday social problems of Galsworthy’s plays, the simplicity of their stage settings and mechanical devices, the absence of emotional demands on the actors, and the natural-sounding dialogues, all helped to suit them to the requirements of the repertory movement.

The repertory movement was a natural product of the Realist Drama, and in its turn helped greatly in the development of that drama. And the Realist Drama is a very interesting phenomenon in the history of the stage. By the Realist Drama I mean that produced by Ibsen, Galsworthy, Shaw (*Widowers’ Houses*, *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*), Granville Barker, and the Manchester School. St. John Ervine and Somerset Maugham may be regarded as Realists who chose to write mostly in the form of the Comedy of

Manners, and Barrie as a queer example of a fantastic imagination which tried to express itself through the medium of the Realist stage.<sup>1</sup> Later developments may be seen in the "Naturalistic" plays of Noel Coward and John van Druten, and examples of combination of realist technique with later fashions in the theatre in the work of James Bridie, Eugene O'Neill, C. K. Munro and Sean O'Casey. It does not seem to me likely that the Realist Drama will attract many important writers in the immediate future, but it still survives on the commercial stage (*Love on the Dole* and the plays of Emlyn Williams) and, in a watered-down form, in the films. We can look back on it now, and see it as a whole, and notice how very well it was adapted to the literary needs of the time. It was not just that a way of thought concerned largely with Man and society needed a drama in which the main subjects dealt with would be social and political. It was adapted to the needs of the time more subtly than that. For a materialist age needed a materialist drama, and the main preoccupation of the Realist Drama is with *things*—with the photographic representation of an appearance of real life. Hence we get playwrights describing their scenes in great detail—the furniture, the wallpaper, the books on the wall, the flowers on the table, the music on the piano, and even, in extreme cases, the view through the window. Shaw, in *Candida*, perhaps with his tongue slightly in his cheek, carefully describes the exterior of a house, the street, and the public gardens nearby before he starts his play in the *drawing-room of the house*. Granville Barker, in *The Madras House*, not only describes the furniture and decorating of the head office in a departmental store, but gives an art criticism of it and tells us much of its history. These dramatists would probably explain this habit by saying that in the early years of the century their plays were more often read than acted, and that they were trying to convey to the reader all that he would otherwise miss. Certain other factors helped to lay emphasis on photographic detail and accuracy of setting. The general trend of the theatre from the Elizabethan open-air stage, through the apron stage of the Restoration to the picture-frame stage of the nineteenth century caused pictorial presentation to become increasingly important. The development of such things as electric lighting, drop curtains,

<sup>1</sup> In the ball scene in *A Kiss for Cinderella*, a fantastic slightly-surrealist dream is expressed in terms of photographic realism.



more mobile scenery, etc., also contributed to this. But the main reason for the emphasis on photographic representations was that it was in keeping with the materialism of the age. Dramatists and producers used great ingenuity in the attempt to produce a life-like picture. The stage came to be regarded as a room with one wall (that next to the audience) knocked down. Many devices were used to give verisimilitude and variety. In one play the stage was set to suggest that the fourth (the invisible) wall was that which contained the fireplace; fire-irons and a fender were drawn up to the footlights, and the actors sat round the front of the stage warming their hands on the heads of the orchestra. Scenes in which the principal actor sat or stood with his back to the audience became common. After a while producers began to realise that they could produce a life-like effect better by emphasising a few significant details than by crowding the stage with "properties." Barrie was praised for a play set in a lawyer's office in which he suggested the passage of time between the acts merely by substituting on the wall a portrait of King Edward for that of Queen Victoria, and later one of King George V for that of King Edward. Noel Coward caused a gasp in the breath of the huge audiences which saw *Cavalcade* in the scene in which a young couple are on honeymoon on board ship. The woman's wrap is lying over a lifebelt. They talk about the future and as they leave the woman picks up her wrap and the name of the ship is seen on the lifebelt—S.S. *Titanic*.

✓The playwrights also devoted themselves to achieving a "natural look" in their scenes and dialogues. They began to avoid coincidence and many of the ordinary dramatic devices of climax. In particular they were concerned with a naturalistic opening. In the popular plays of the nineteenth century the curtain rose frequently on the scene between the housemaid and the butler:

"*Housemaid*: Is lunch nearly ready? They are waiting for it upstairs.

"*Butler*: It will be ready very shortly.

"*Housemaid*: Beef again, I expect. They never seem to have any fowl or game in this house.

"*Butler*: Hush, Ellen. You must never mention fowl in this house—but perhaps I ought to have warned you before.

"*Housemaid*: Never mention fowl! What do you mean?

"*Butler*: Well, my dear, ever since Lord Alfred hanged himself in the henhouse, my lady cannot bear the thought of anything with feathers on. But that was before your time, of course. And even though Lord Alfred was my lady's cousin—being the son of Lady Jane, my lady's aunt, you know—and in spite of the fact that the elder sons of younger daughters have always been ill-fated in this family. . . ."

And so on. The problem of the butler and the housemaid is one which can be seen cropping up in one form or another over and over again. But the more thorough-going realists dispensed with the butler and housemaid, even in a cleverly disguised form, and let such information as was necessary to the understanding of the play gradually seep through the conversation of the characters. This may have made openings less artificial, but it also made them slower. Some playwrights tried to suggest that the curtain had gone up on an ordinary everyday conversation. They let the talk be passed about from mouth to mouth, mostly irrelevant and distracting, so that the audience spent the first five or ten minutes wondering what the play was going to be about and which of the characters was likely to be important. Granville Barker, in *Waste*, a play, most of which is admirably to the point, starts with one of the characters playing Chopin's Prelude Opus 28, No. 20, as the curtain goes up and then three or four pages of this sort of thing:

"*Lady Davenport*: Thank you, my dear Julia.

"*Walter Kent* (protesting): No more?

"*Mrs. Farrant*: I won't play for a moment longer than I feel musical.

"*Miss Trebell*: Do you think it right, Julia, to finish with that after an hour's Bach?

"*Mrs. Farrant*: I suddenly came over Chopinesque, Fanny. . . . What's your objection? (as she sits by her).

"*Frances Trebell*: What . . . when Bach has roused me to the heights of unselfishness.

"*Amy O'Connell* (grimacing sweetly, her eyes only half-lifted): Does he? I'm so glad I don't understand him!"

This goes on for a long time. The popular dramatist might excuse

himself by saying that late-comers miss the opening lines and distract the attention of the rest of the audience, so that it is unwise to waste any witty or important lines during the first few minutes. No such excuse, however, will do for the end of the first act of *The Madras House*, by the same dramatist, which, after the main themes have been presented breaks up into lines like these:

"*Julia*: Yes, it means rain . . . when you see it so clearly.

"*Philip*: Well, see you to-morrow, Uncle Henry."

and a welter of Good-byes (fifteen altogether) and handshakes.

There is probably a touch of satire in this latter example, but scenes involving a large number of speaking parts are very difficult to handle in the realistic method. They are more successful when the scene is a debate or a conference, as is the Cabinet meeting in *Waste*, or the other Cabinet meeting in the last act of *The Apple Cart*—a play in which Shaw comes nearer to the realistic manner than is usual for him. Perhaps the most effective large-scale scene in the pure realistic manner on the modern English stage is the auctioneering scene in Galsworthy's *The Skin Game*.

I do not want to suggest that these dramatists were consciously occupied with photographic realism because they were materialists. Indeed, the Realist Drama became so much the dominant art form of the time that it was adopted, quite naturally, by people who were not temperamentally suited to it. Chesterton, for instance, produced in *Magic* a play which bears about the same relation to the average realist play as do the Father Brown stories to the average detective novel. Even D. H. Lawrence wrote several plays which in technique were no more than poor imitations of, say, *Hobson's Choice*. But the fact that so many writers of the time chose this form is important as a guide to their unconsciously-held beliefs. By style and by choice of medium, writers often reveal their real beliefs more truly than by explicit professions of faith or opinion. A comparison of prose styles of Wells and Hemingway, ignoring their content, would tell much of the outlook of each. And the Realist Drama was admirably suited to an age which saw no religious significance in Man, but regarded him primarily as a social animal, and which based its judgments on a set of materialist values.

## *Arnold Bennett*

I HAVE heard that Arnold Bennett is no longer read very much, and indeed, that his work is almost unknown to younger readers. If this is true, it is a pity, for Bennett has a charm which few of his contemporaries had. He was an objective writer, one to whom the world was a spectacle which he observed without passion except for the eagerness of the artist to see and record. He was, of course, interested in social problems, as indeed has been almost everyone in this century. Again, like his contemporaries, he tended to see in social reform the solution of all problems of society and of the individual. But he did not choose to write about these things. In his novels he was not a preacher, not a protagonist, nor an idealist. He was first and foremost a man looking at the world, delighted with nearly everything he saw. Indeed, there was something naïve about him, something of the country cousin come up to town, which was his most endearing attribute. He never became sophisticated or blasé, however much he may have posed as the "Card", out for making money and getting on, the hard-headed man from the North. Later in his life, his delight in created beings led to his being too easily attracted by the glitter and bustle of Metropolitan society. He began to be fascinated with clubs and hotels, till in the end he wrote a novel with an hotel as the chief character (*Imperial Palace*). But in his earlier work he was interested more in the landscape and way of life which was the inheritance of his childhood, and in his reaction to these he showed himself the true poet of materialism.

Poetry in the age<sup>1</sup> of materialism in modern literature was nearly all "poetry of escape." There were a few poets, such as Yeats, Wilfred Owen, who anticipated later developments, and there was Walter de la Mare, whose poetry belongs to no particular period, but is timeless—you feel that de la Mare would have

<sup>1</sup> It should be remembered that the three periods into which I have divided modern literature for the purpose of this book are not to be measured in time. They overlap and even co-exist. By poets of the materialist age I mean the poets who shared the same general outlook as that of Shaw, Galsworthy, Wells, etc.—in other words, the Georgians.

written much the same in Ancient Egypt. The characteristic poets of the period wrote of the countryside, often as week-enders, who did not know the country well, but were glad of a change both of surroundings and habits. Many poets entered into this with the enthusiasm of townspeople with country cottages, who subscribe to the local flower-shows and try to encourage folk-dancing and maypoles. There was much hearty verse about tramping the highways, and the joys of sleeping in barns. Still more about village pubs. Some of the verse was didactic and we were asked to believe how much better was the life of these literary hikers than that of the urban population. Or the poet remembered the fall of the leaf and the setting of the sun and hurried to get a drink before closing time. It is significant, however, that the best of these poets nearly all were satisfied just to describe something they had seen or done. The poems of W. H. Davies are quite unpretentious, but they do record a genuine experience. In a very different way, we get the same quiet but accurate observation in the poetry of Edmund Blunden.

Undoubtedly the most remarkable of those Georgian poets whose verse was largely descriptive of natural scenery was Edward Thomas. His verse is delicate in rhythm and music. The words seem to come naturally and inevitably out of the language of everyday experience, with no conscious literary effort:

“It was a perfect day  
For sowing; just  
As sweet and dry was the ground  
As tobacco dust.”<sup>1</sup>

Above all, the emotional pitch of the poems is kept low, so that always he is speaking quietly, not making a song of it. The art of stating the occasion quite quietly, and leaving the emotion to rise by sympathy in the reader's mind, instead of emphasising it and trying to play on the reader's feelings, is rare and delicate. Few can do it in our day except Robert Frost in America and Alun Lewis, and above all Mrs. Anne Ridler. It is an art not appreciated by the average reader, who tends to admire verse where the emotion written about is greater than the emotion felt. This emotional pretentiousness, leading to vague phrases and hollow words is perhaps the most common fault of the would-be poet.

<sup>1</sup> “Digging”: *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas* (Faber and Faber).

Edward Thomas looks at the countryside with an eye trained like a scientist's:

"They have taken the gable from the roof of clay  
On the long swede pile. They have let in the sun  
To the white and gold and purple of curled fronds  
Unsunned."<sup>1</sup>

He does not try to find any special significance, neither didactic nor mystical, in what he sees. He is the true materialist, getting such pleasure as he can in things as they are, and recording his pleasures and experiences in verse.

It is surely no accident that, at a time when most novelists and dramatists were concerned with the appearances of things, the best Nature poetry should have been as plain, accurate and circumstantial as this:

"There they stand, on their ends, the fifty faggots  
That once were underwood of hazel and ash  
In Jenny Pinks's Copse. Now, by the hedge  
Close packed, they make a thicket fancy alone  
Can creep through with the mouse and wren."<sup>2</sup>

Edward Thomas was a man of materialist habit of thought who rejected the civilisation which materialism had produced. Arnold Bennett accepted it. He had much in common with Thomas—a keen vision, a knack of keeping images clear as photographs in his memory, and the gift of direct, unsentimental description—but he was not repelled by nineteenth- and twentieth-century urban life. On the contrary, he was fascinated by it. He grew up as a boy in the Potteries and learned to take his surroundings for granted. Then he saw to his surprise that they were beautiful. It was not the surprise of a visitor who finds something he did not expect; it was the surprise of a man whose eyes are suddenly opened to see in a different light what he had been looking at all his life. The surprise never left him, but on the whole he said little about it. He liked to pretend that he was still taking it all for granted:

"On their left were two pitheads whose double wheels revolved rapidly in smooth silence and the puffing engine-house and all

<sup>1</sup> "Swedes": *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas* (Faber and Faber).

<sup>2</sup> "Fifty Faggots": *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas*.

the trucks and gear of a large ironstone mine. On their right was the astonishing farm, with barns and ricks and cornfields complete, seemingly quite unaware of its forlorn oddness in that foul arena of manufacture. In front, on a little hill in the vast valley, was spread out the Indian-red architecture of Bursley—tall chimneys and rounded ovens, schools, the new scarlet market, the grey tower of the old church, the high spire of the evangelical church, the low spire of the church of the genuflexions, and the crimson chapels, and rows of little red houses with amber chimney-pots, and the gold angel of the blackened Town Hall topping the whole. The sedate reddish browns and reds of the composition, all netted in flowing scarves of smoke, harmonised exquisitely with the chill blues of the chequered sky. Beauty was achieved, and none saw it.”<sup>1</sup>

This paragraph deserves attention. “The foul arena of manufacture” is a conventional phrase brought in simply because Bennett was afraid the reader might miss the point of the contrast. It is obvious that he didn’t mean it because of the affection with which he describes the “puffing engine-house” at the beginning. In the sentence next to the last he does some deliberate beauty-mongering, and the journalese which results (“harmonised exquisitely,” “chill blues,” “chequered sky”) is hard to forgive. But the middle of the paragraph is excellent in its plain, straightforward description—shapes, and pattern, enough topography to give sense to the whole, and colour which comes there quite naturally instead of having been put there for effect. In this passage he is looking through the eyes of the two boys about whom he is writing. Here indeed is the accurate record of outward forms demanded of a Realist novelist, heightened by the vision of a poet or a painter.

Bennett was about the first Englishman to realise the beauty of Industrial landscape, or at any rate to say so. To the younger generation brought up in such a scene its beauty seems obvious enough, indeed there developed in the 1930’s something of a cult for industrial landscape.

“Tramways and slagbanks, bits of old machinery,  
Such was and still is my ideal scenery”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Clayhanger*.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters from Iceland*, by W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice (Faber and Faber).

said W. H. Auden—but it is doubtful whether many of those who imitated him knew much more of the industrial North than can be seen from a train travelling to the Lake District. The appreciation of mines, blast furnaces and mineral railways was a natural and salutary reaction from the second-hand Wordsworthianism of the week-enders, but if carried too far it may interpret the physical universe completely in terms of Man—indeed, it may suggest that Man is a better landscape gardener than God. I don't think this applies in the case of Auden, but I suspect that the fascination which derelict factories and abandoned mines have for him may be a sort of twentieth-century Gothic romanticism. Byron contemplated ruined castles and brooded on the tragedy of Man; Auden inspects grass-grown iron-ore workings.

Bennett's love of the landscape of the Potteries, however, was neither a pose nor a cult, but the response of one who was interested in all that he saw around him.



Bennett's work is very uneven. The fiction may be divided into "serious" novels, pot-boilers, and in-between books which are either "serious" novels which fail or pot-boilers which pretend to be more than they are. The pot-boilers are not to be despised. Bennett often wrote his light fiction with fine craftsmanship, and with fantastic plot and characters well-drawn on the surface. *The Grand Babylon Hotel* opens with an amusing scene in which an American millionaire visits a luxury hotel with his daughter. At dinner the daughter refuses the elaborate menu and asks for steak and beer. The management is polite, but determined not to serve such a dish. Appeals are of no avail, so the millionaire interviews the proprietor, buys the hotel, and sees that his daughter's wishes are carried out.

It is interesting to see how Bennett here satisfies a vulgar day-dream—that of money as power. The people of his time thought so naturally in economic terms that their image of a powerful man was of a multi-millionaire. Shaw produced Undershaft, the armament manufacturer, in *Major Barbara*, and Tarleton, the underwear king, in *Misalliance*. Lord Peter Wimsey is a similar case on a more popular level. No doubt Lord Peter appeals also to the fantasy of indulging in the pleasures of the rich, but within



the framework of the novels it is clear that Miss Sayers meant his wealth primarily to be a means of power.

*Buried Alive* is another of Bennett's novels, written as an entertainment, which shows a high level of craftsmanship. It tells the story of a world-famous painter who when his valet dies announces the death as his own and assumes the identity of the valet. The scenes in which he attends his own funeral are done with a lightness of touch which is scarcely to be found elsewhere in literature of this level. Later he marries, and then quietly starts to paint again, till his style gives him away to the critics. Bennett tells his story without the slightest over-emphasis and with quiet verisimilitude in the scenes of the inner London suburbs. Within the framework of the story everything is quite convincing, yet there is no pretence that the story is anything but the wildest fancy and even farce. Bennett does not try to play on the secret desires of his readers by presenting a wish-fulfilling fantasy under the guise of bogus realism, as do so many of the erotic "realist" novels. Because of this, and because also of the craftsmanship and sureness of tone, *Buried Alive* ranks very high among modern novels of entertainment.

Light reading is a necessity for most people at times, and it is one of the deficiencies of present-day literature that the novel of pure entertainment is on the whole of such poor quality. Indeed, the better sort of detective novel is practically all one can think of, together with the novels of one or two comic writers like Wodehouse, a few plain, historical romancers, like C. S. Forrester and the late John Buchan. There is some hope for the future, however, in the crisp gangster or secret service stories of Graham Greene<sup>1</sup> (*A Gun for Sale*) and G. F. Green (*Music in the Park*). Apart from these, there are only the intellectual holiday camps of the middle-brows—Priestley's *Faraway* and Charles Morgan's *The Fountain*. It is better to say nothing of women's fiction and Miss Blandish.



The best of Bennett, however, is to be found in the stories of the Five Towns, and of these *Clayhanger* is typical, and at the same time the most satisfactory.

<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to distinguish between Greene's excellent thrillers and his more important works like *Brighton Rock* and *The Power and the Glory*.

Edwin Clayhanger is seen first as a boy on the way home from his last day at school. He is to go into the office of his father's printing works. This, naturally enough, he does not want to do, for Clayhanger had a vague dissatisfaction with the commercial and industrial world into which he grows up. He had a feeling that money-making did not comprise nor explain the whole of existence. He was puzzled, too, about many things in life, and looked about him with a timid curiosity which was always thwarted and finally dulled. Like a humbler character, Kipps, he was half aware of mysteries around him to which his education and way of thinking gave him no means of approach. Clayhanger and Kipps, in their vague, puzzled, inarticulate fashion, are the nearest approaches to the Byronic man in an age which was essentially romantic. Clayhanger's hopes take the form of an ambition to be an architect, but the printing house wins. He falls in love, and his love leaves him, and on the death of his father, he settles down to the life of a successful business man in the Five Towns. His love is restored to him in the last chapter, but her earlier life and his life with her are left for two further volumes, *Hilda Lessways* and *These Twain*. (Bennett's occasional falls from grace in the matter of style are paralleled by his taste for Hall Caine-like titles.)

The character of Clayhanger is interesting as an example of the unexpressed dissatisfaction and aspirations of the time, but the value of the book is in its picture of a society—the commercial middle and lower-middle classes of a provincial town in the second half of the nineteenth century. Bennett's picture had the merit of being drawn from life. He set his story firmly in the Five Towns, and made use also of local history and the events of his childhood. Such an incident as the celebration of the centenary of the establishment of Sunday schools has the authentic ring of an eyewitness. Indeed, like many other novelists, Bennett wrote best about those things which had impressed him as a boy. There is about some of the incidents a faint halo of nostalgia, but they are seen clearly and vividly, solid as mahogany, in the way in which some scenes fix themselves upon the memory and imagination of childhood and never lose their grip. There is the time when Big James took the young Edwin to a Free and Easy at the "Dragon," organised by the Bursley Mutual Burial Club. Big James himself rendered "The Miller of Dee" and there was also a female clog-

dancer (an innovation to the Five Towns), but the main item of the evening was a male voice quartet:

"Messrs. Arthur Smallrice, Abraham Harracles, Jos. Rawnpike and James Yarlett rose, stepped heavily on to the little platform, and stood in a line with their hands in their pockets. 'As a bird is known by its note——' was hidden by the rampart of their shoulders. They had no music. They knew the music; they had sung it a thousand times. They knew precisely the effects which they wished to produce, and the means of production. They worked together like an inspired machine. Mr. Arthur Smallrice gave a rapid glance into a corner, and from that corner a concertina spoke—one short note. Then began, with no hesitating shuffling preliminaries nor mute consultations, the singing of that classic quartet, justly celebrated from Hull to Wigan and from Northallerton to Lichfield, 'Loud Ocean's Roar.' The thing was performed with absolute assurance and perfection. Mr. Arthur Smallrice did the yapping of the small waves on the foam-veiled rocks, and Big James in fullest grandeur did the long and mighty rolling of the deep. It was majestic, terrific, and overwhelming. Many bars before the close Edwin was thrilled, as by an exquisite and vast revelation. He tingled from head to foot. He had never heard any singing like it, or any singing in any way comparable to it. He had never guessed that song held such possibilities of emotion. The pure and fine essential qualities of the voices, the dizzying harmonies, the fugal calls and responses, the strange relief of the unisons, and above all the free, natural mien of the singers, proudly aware that they were producing something beautiful that could not be produced more beautifully, conscious of unchallenged supremacy—all this enfevered him to an unprecedented and self-astonished enthusiasm.

"He murmured under his breath, as 'Loud Ocean's Roar' died away and the little voices of the street supervened: 'By Gad! By Gad!'

"The applause was generous. Edwin stamped and clapped with childlike violence and fury. Mr. Peake slowly and regularly thumped one fist on the bench, puffing the while. Glasses and mugs could be seen, but not heard, dancing. Mr. Arthur Smallrice, Mr. Abraham Harracles, Mr. Jos. Rawnpike and Mr. James Yarlett, entirely inattentive to the acclamations, stepped heavily from the platform and sat down."

This is truly seen and remembered, and the slight touch of sentimentalism is sanctioned because the scene is surveyed in the memory of a boy. Except for the old-fashioned style, it is the sort of thing which is attempted by the writers of many modern short stories.

Not all of the scenes have over them this glow of memory. In one chapter, not very relevant to the main story, Bennett describes the boyhood of Edwin's father, Darius Clayhanger. Darius worked at the age of seven as a "mould-runner" in a pottery. Then he and his mother and father and sister were sent to the workhouse, and were only rescued because a Sunday-school superintendent had been able to get a job for Darius' father, and for Darius himself a situation as a printer's devil. It is a passage of clear, passionate social writing of a sort common since then, but rare at the time.

Bennett's picture of society is real, solid, and three-dimensional so far as outward appearances go. That he missed much is obvious, and also, that, except for the vague misgivings, his characters have purpose only in the social pattern. The section of society which he wrote about in the Five Towns novels is as limited as that of Galsworthy's novels, but it included a greater proportion of the population, and it remains to-day, though changed, much more than do the Forsytes. Bennett's novels are one of the best products of a materialist age—honest, accurate, vivid, detailed and made with that joy in reproducing the appearance of reality which is found also in the paintings of the Impressionists.

## Wells

THE literary output of Wells falls into three periods: first, the scientific romances; second, the realist comedies; and, third, the discursive novels and tracts. Wells' gift for comedy did not leave him after the publication of *Tono-Bungay*, but he chose to throw it away. Novel after novel starts with a framework of fiction and then digresses into long passages of preaching and arguing. In *Marriage* the two main characters go off to Labrador to discuss life. *The Undying Fire* is a journalese version of Job. *The Soul of a Bishop* is a result of his wartime experiment in the invention of a Wellsian God. *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* and *The World of William Clissold* hardly trouble to keep up the pretence of fiction. Yet even as late as 1925, Wells was able to open *Christina Alberta's Father* with scenes which have much the same charm as *Kipps*, but on the whole he was lost to literature after about 1910.

His earlier novels may be considered more conveniently later in this study. At the moment we will look at his middle period on which his literary reputation rests. Its main products are the four comic novels, *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, *Kipps*, *Mr. Polly*, and *Tono-Bungay*. *Mr. Lewisham* is attractive, but immature, and *Tono-Bungay* shows signs of the coming rot, though in Uncle Pondelero it has one of Wells' most gorgeous creations. But *Kipps* and *Mr. Polly* are still a joy. They are in the Dickens tradition—novels of sympathetic caricature, of everyday settings, of homely troubles and pleasures. They have also a Dickensian topography, that of a pre-suburban Kent and the Home Counties—Rochester, Canterbury and Folkestone. They have, too, a period flavour, for the character of the time of which they tell—1890-1910—passed away quickly. It had not the enduring, hard-dying qualities of Victorian industrialism. Hansom cabs and high collars have disappeared, but slagbanks and Gothic chapels remain. Hence these novels seem to tell of a time more distant than that of Bennett's stories, though actually the date was later.

It is obvious that Wells has much in common with Bennett—(and by Wells I mean, at present, the Wells of *Mr. Polly*, etc.). He,

too, is a sort of poet of materialism. But while Bennett had the eye of a painter, and noticed outward forms and shapes, Wells is concerned more with the lives of his characters. His is the poetry of simple pleasures—country pubs, piers at small seaside resorts, cycle rides along tow-paths. He has a real understanding of the problems—especially economic—of the average man. He knows, too, the queer muddle of ideas caused by bad schooling and undigested information from newspapers, Sunday schools and casual conversation. For the simple souls, who are so often the most attractive characters in his novels, he has a real sympathy, and an understanding of their puzzled and thwarted gropings for enlightenment. Thus Kipps, sitting in a boat with Ann, rowing, or, rather, resting on his oars, on the Hythe Canal:

“‘Artie,’ said Ann.

“‘He woke up and pulled a stroke. ‘What?’ he said.

“‘Penny for your thoughts, Artie.’

“‘He considered.

“‘I reely don’t think I was thinking of anything,’ he said at last, with a smile. ‘No.’

“‘He still rested on his oars.

“‘I expect,’ he said, ‘I was thinking jest what a Rum Go everything is. I expect it was something like that.’

“‘Queer old Artie!’

“‘Ain’t I? I don’t suppose there was ever a chap quite like me before.’

“‘He reflected for just another minute.

“‘Oo!—I dunno,’ he said at last, and roused himself to pull.”<sup>1</sup>

In *Mr. Polly* we find not only this quest for enlightenment, but a very real response to beauty and even literature, a response which has been distorted but never completely killed. *Mr. Polly* has thoughts beyond those of *Kipps*. He cannot formulate them, but they are there, and in his struggle for expression he has invented for himself one of the most original vocabularies in English literature. Here, to compare with the end of *Kipps* is the end of *Mr. Polly*. (*Mr. Polly* and the fat landlady of the Potwell Inn are sitting outside on a summer evening, looking at the river and the sunset):

<sup>1</sup> *Kipps*.

" 'Then what have we done,' said Mr. Polly, 'to get an evening like this? Lord! Look at it!' He set his arm round the great curve of the sky.

" 'If I was a nigger or an Indian I would come out here and sing. I whistle sometimes, but, bless you, it's singing I've got on my mind. Sometimes I think I live for sunsets.'

" 'I don't see that it does you any good always looking at sunsets, like you do,' said the fat woman.

" 'Nor me. But I do. Sunsets and things I was made to like.'

" 'They don't help you,' said the fat woman, thoughtfully.

" 'Who cares?' said Mr. Polly.

" 'A deeper strain had come to the fat woman. 'You got to die some day,' she said.

" 'Some things I can't believe,' said Mr. Polly suddenly, 'and one is your being a skeleton. . . .'

" 'He pointed his hand towards the neighbour's hedge.

" 'Look at 'em—against the yellow—and they're just stinging nettles. Nasty weeds—if you count things by their uses. And no help in the life hereafter. But just look at the look of them.'

" 'It isn't only looks,' said the fat woman.

" 'Whenever there's signs of a good sunset and I'm not too busy,' said Mr. Polly, 'I'll come and sit out here.'

" 'The fat woman looked at him with eyes in which contentment struggled with some obscure reluctant protest, and at last turned them slowly to the black nettle pagodas against the golden sky.

" 'I wish we could,' she said.

" 'I will.'

" 'The fat woman's voice sank nearly to the inaudible.

" 'Not always,' she said.

" 'Mr. Polly was some time before he replied. 'Come here always, when I'm a ghost,' he replied.

" 'Spoil the place for others,' said the fat woman, abandoning her moral solitudes for a more congenial point of view.

" 'Not my sort of ghost wouldn't,' said Mr. Polly, emerging from another long pause. 'I'd be a sort of diaphanous feeling—just mellowish and warmish like. . . .'

" 'They said no more, but sat on in the warm twilight, until at last they could scarcely distinguish each other's faces. They were not so much thinking, as lost in a smooth, still quiet of mind. A bat flitted by.

“‘Time we was going in, O’ Party,’ said Mr. Polly, standing up. ‘Supper to get. It’s as you say, we can’t sit here for ever.’”<sup>1</sup>

In these four books he is concerned in particular with the pressure of society upon the individual, and his sympathies are always with the individual. He explained that he wanted to show “a contemporary man in relation to the state and social usage, and the social organism in relation to that man.” Later, as he became interested in many aspects of the thought of his time, he began to see the novel as a bottle into which he could pour all his theories and arguments and prejudices and puzzlings; he began to look on the novel not as an art form, but as a palatable disguise for an encyclopædia. And, needless to say, the bottle burst. Of these aims he said: “We novelists are going to deal with political questions, and religious questions and social questions. [We are going to] deal freely with the religious beliefs and organisations that have controlled or failed to control them. . . . We are going to write about business and finance and politics and precedence and pretentiousness and decorum and indecorum, until a thousand pretences and ten thousand impostures shrivel in the cold clean draught of our elucidation. Before we have done we will have put all life into the novel.” They certainly wrote about business and finance, etc., but they came very far from putting all life into the novel—there are times when they don’t seem to put any life into it at all.

In *Kipps* and *Mr. Polly*, however, he was too concerned with the story and the characters to digress often into discussions on business and the rest. No doubt the autobiographic element fascinated him, especially in *Kipps*. But in both he carried out his aim to present the relation between the social organism and one particular individual. *Kipps* tells of a young man, brought up as an assistant in a large haberdasher’s shop, who inherits money, mixes with genteel society and is thoroughly miserable till he gets back to his own class. The attraction of the book lies in the generous sympathy for the blundering and bewildered Kipps, and in the contrast between his sincerity and the opportunism of most of the middle-class people whom he meets. But this is not entirely what Wells intended. He himself explains:

<sup>1</sup> “The History of Mr. Polly.”



"Kipps was invented in a mood of indignation; he is an undernourished creature mentally and bodily, slightly rickety and ungrammatical and weakly snobbish. I shall show, I said, what the greatest and richest and proudest empire that the world has ever seen can do for one of its sons. And then let me put around him specimens of the business enterprise, the social and cultural forces, of his time."

I think Wells succeeded in his purpose, but he did more. The social document remained, but the mood of indignation was forgotten and the characters were allowed to come alive.

Wells must have had very much the same intention when he planned *Mr. Polly*. Not that he could ever have conceived of Mr. Polly as "an undernourished creature mentally and bodily." Mr. Polly is an exuberant creation with a strong individuality. He has suffered from more or less the same education as Kipps, but though his mind as a thinking machine has been damaged and put out of gear it has not been stopped. He had sought out and read strange books. He had invented a language. He remained always a man of ideas, of queer bursts of originality, but with no sense of proportion at all; a mixture of self-pity and fun, of timidity and courage. There is no other comic character in modern fiction to be compared with him, except Mr. Bloom, whom, in the eyes of one reader at least, he resembles in many ways.

Wells then sets about to show how society can try to cripple such a man. It puts him in a dying shop in a small south-country town, and makes him struggle for years against growing debt, a nagging wife and chronic indigestion. (It is clear that Wells regarded unhappy marriage as one of the social evils of the time, and probably he would have regarded indigestion as a by-product of them.) Mr. Polly, however, is not crippled entirely. It takes an unsuccessful attempt at suicide and a tremendously successful attempt at arson to make him realise this, but he does realise it in the end. Then follows the sojourn at the Potwell Inn, and the repulse of Uncle Jim's threefold siege. There is the struggle with the broom on the edge of the river:

"Then suddenly, a wild hope filled Mr. Polly. He saw the river was very near, the post to which the punt was tied not three yards away. With a wild yell he sent the broom home under his antagonist's ribs. 'Woosh!' he cried, as the resistance gave.

“‘Oh *Gaw!*’ said Uncle Jim, going backward helplessly, and Mr. Polly thrust hard, and abandoned the broom to the enemy’s despairing clutch.

“Splash! Uncle Jim was in the water, and Mr. Polly had leapt like a cat aboard the ferry punt, and grasped the pole.

“Up came Uncle Jim, spluttering and dripping.

“‘You (unprofitable matter, and printing it might lead to a Censorship of Novels)—You know I got a weak chess!’

“The pole took him in the throat and drove him backward and downwards.

“‘Lea go!’ cried Uncle Jim, staggering with real terror in his once awful eyes.”

There was the skirmish in the inn itself:

“‘Bolls!’ (said Uncle Jim), surveying the bar. ‘Fighting with bolls. I’ll show ’im fighting with bolls!’”

And there was the Night Attack. In all this Wells does not worry what he is showing in relation to what. He writes instead with immense verve, and rises to the level of pure farce. He was never to do anything like that again, and the Potwell Inn remains in our memory and affection, unique and unrivalled in the fiction of this century.

Though Wells drops his preaching during much of it, his limited conception of Man prevents Mr. Polly from coming out in the round as it were—he stays a caricature in two dimensions, though a very lively one. Beside *The Rainbow*, *Portrait of an Artist*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* or *Light in August*, *The History of Mr. Polly* looks slight and even trivial, but I think it may have in it more than they have of the stuff which endures.



When Wells as a young man wrote for the *Science Schools Journal* a serial called *The Chronic Argonauts*, he hit upon a medium which was well-suited to his fantastic and prolific imagination at that stage of his development. *The Chronic Argonauts* was afterwards re-written as *The Time Machine* and became the first of the scientific romances which were to gain Wells his first reputation.

*The Time Machine*, of course, is about a visit into the future.

*The War of the Worlds* tells of an invasion of the Earth by the inhabitants of Mars. *The War in the Air* is an ingenious foresight of Zeppelins and fighter planes. *The First Men in the Moon* and *The Invisible Man* explain themselves. There are shorter stories too: stories of the cave men; of a star which swings near the earth and causes great tidal waves and earthquakes; of a drug which enables men to move and think and live at immense speed, so that all life around them seems in slow motion. And there are stories in which the method is carried to absurdity with delightful results—as in *The Truth about Piecraft*, where a fat man takes an Indian recipe to lose weight, and remains fat but floats about the room till he resorts to lead weights on his underwear. At about this time Wells' brain was teeming with fantastic ideas which he converted into one sort of story or another.

Sometimes (not often) he missed the mark, and at others he failed to make full use of his material. For instance, *The Invisible Man* might have been a great comic novel, or, in the hands of Franz Kafka, it might have been a book of tragic horror, but it ends only as a tale of wild adventure.

These stories were received with enthusiasm by the public and it is interesting to see why. There was at the time a great interest in new machinery and scientific inventions, and a hope that science was going to open up a new world. But the popularity went deeper than that. We may be able to understand it if we consider the ancestry of the Scientific Romance. The immediate precursor of Wells was, of course, Jules Verne. Wells had not the imaginative power of Verne, nor the same fantastic vision, but he had more humour, his characters were more interesting, and he had greater ingenuity and was able to make his ideas seem "scientifically" plausible. Verne cannot be regarded as the originator of the scientific romance, and his precursors can be traced back to the grotesque stories of the eighteenth century, such as *Gulliver's Travels* and, in particular, *The Life and Adventures of Peter Wilkins* by Robert Paltock. *Peter Wilkins* tells of a country of Graundevolet, which is inhabited by winged beings, and Paltock follows the example of Defoe (*The Apparition of Mrs. Veal*, etc.) and uses many realistic devices, including the invention of a language. The book had few imitators for a long time, but it seems to me important that it appeared in 1751, just a little while before the publication of *The Castle of Otranto*, which started the

vogue of the Gothic novel. *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolfo*, *The Monk* and the rest of them are still rattling good entertainment, and their significance, apart from the fact that they were the beginning of the Romantic Movement, is in their revolt against the authority of reason in the eighteenth century. That part of the human mind which was never satisfied by the limited scientific outlook suddenly began to shout out for attention. It got it, on the one hand, in the mysteries, ghosts and groans of the Gothic tales, and on the other in the marvellous natural history of the scientific romance. The latter developed slowly, but the two forms went on to end one as the detective novel and the other as the Wellsian romance. It is obvious, however, that there has been a change in the course of development, and a change which is more than a change of style, or setting. The mysteries of Miss Sayers are no less far-fetched than those of Mrs. Radcliffe, and the marvels of *The War of the Worlds* are as hard to swallow as those of *Peter Wilkins*, but in the modern books everything is done to make the story credible. As I see it, there is still part of the human mind which hungers and thirsts after marvels, but popular scientific thought will not allow this. A compromise is made therefore. The novelists produce their fanciful countries and strange inventions, but explain them with scientific jargon; they give us mysteries, but add the solution at the back of the book.

Wells' ability to give an apparently sage and serious explanation of his wildest fancies was therefore a great merit from the point of view of the public at the turn of the century, and certainly it adds to the fun. But it also helped to cause their disruption and to build up the fantasy of the scientific Utopia which was more and more to be associated with the name of Wells. I do not think this need interfere with the enjoyment of these novels (and I, for one, enjoy them with zest), but it should be remembered that people began to take these romances seriously, and so, to a certain extent, did the author. I do not mean that Wells ever came to believe objectively in his rockets to the moon and so on, but he began to see the books as vehicles for his conception of the future and purpose of Man. In *The First Men in the Moon* he introduced satire, which is legitimate, though it ruins the story. But in *The Food of the Gods* his dream of inevitable progress, of bigger and better men, ran away with him. I say "bigger" deliberately, for the theme of the book is the discovery of a drug which will cause creatures to

grow very quickly to a great size. It is tried out first on hens, which grow to the size of ostriches. The rats get at it and go about like ravening wolves. There are also mammoth puffballs and enormous bloodsuckers in the river. The excitement grows and is whipped up by Wells' fantastic humour, with here and there an unusual touch of the macabre. Then his judgment leaves him. A baby finds the drug and feeds on it. It grows like mad, crawls away and starts to live on its own, and we are asked to take this gigantic baby as a symbol of the future Superman. Never in the whole literature of Utopia can there have been a more absurd and less convincing image of the future progress of the human race.

In one book after another Wells developed his idea of the inevitable progress of Man, of a planned world, of eugenics, of mechanised labour, "scientific" diet, "scientific education," etc. I need not trouble here about the details of Wells' plans, many of which, no doubt, deserve much more expert consideration than I can pretend to give them. But gradually there arose in the minds of Wells' readers—and even of a good many non-readers—a picture of this planned world of the future. It was built up of skyscrapers, airships, girders, propellers, racing motor cars, streamlined trains, pylons, neon lights, men in shorts, girls with fair hair. Over it all was a bright, yet misty, light, as of dawn beyond the mountains. The scene was re-assembled and emphasised in the film scenario, *The Shape of Things to Come*. Wells presumably wrote it, but it is as if he has obligingly written up the popular idea of a Wellsian world.

This composite picture, an ideological montage, has become a popular symbol for the Liberal conception of Man—a symbol so universally accepted that it is often not seen as a symbol, but is regarded as the thing itself. Canon Demant points out that Liberalism is at variance with Christian dogma on the question of the Fall:

"... Christian dogma posits a Fall of Man, and the fact of original sin. This has been completely misunderstood by the Liberal mind. It has been understood as meaning that becoming is itself a fallen process and that the human spirit is contemptible. It means, in fact, the opposite of both these misunderstandings. Creation is not the Fall; becoming is a real element in existence. But the actual world is fallen, for it is a world in which becoming

is erected by the sinful spirit to the absolute, unconditioned value of the eternal. . . . Because historic Liberalism is a dogma of becoming only, we may, for the purpose of understanding its influence upon the world, say that its essence is the denial of original sin and the Fall.”<sup>1</sup>

This liberal point of view has always had its attraction for the British, so, for patriotic reasons, I think I may name it after the first Christian theologian to formulate it as a new heresy. Pelagius was a Briton, perhaps an Irishman or a Scot who visited the Italian monasteries at the end of the fourth century or the beginning of the fifth. Characteristic of the British abroad, he was shocked by what he saw. Characteristic again, he was something of a pragmatist, and judged doctrine by its practical results in the lives of the believers. If the results did not satisfy him, he was ready to change the doctrine. In Italy he came to the conclusion that the doctrine of Original Sin too easily became an excuse for venial faults, and he therefore preached a doctrine which amounted, roughly, to the denial of original sin. The subtleties of the implications of his teaching may be left to the theologians. It is enough for me to say that by Pelagianism I mean the Liberal conception of Man as progressing more or less inevitably, towards perfection.

Pelagianism is made the subject of most of Wells' later novels, and its assumptions lie behind the work of all the novelists I have discussed so far. Indeed, it goes very deep into the habit of thought of this century. Those of us who reject it consciously often harbour it unknown to ourselves in our ways of thinking. It has permeated all popular literature, journalism, newspapers, the films, the radio, advertising and so on. There have been advertisements of drugs illustrated by a research scientist with a halo like an archangel, and many commodities such as motor cars and wireless sets advertise by means of Wellsian vistas into the future. Much of the vaguer talk about a New World after the war was of this sort—the assumption being that progress was inevitable in the ordinary course of events; Hitler was interrupting progress; therefore beat Hitler and progress would go on again by itself. Progress (in the limited sense) is generally taken for granted as one of the self-evident facts requiring no explanation or argument. When, at a local government council, some member objects to certain altera-

<sup>1</sup> *The Religious Prospect*, by V. A. Demant.

tions or improvements (such as the building of a shelter in the park), he is often countered by: "It seems, sir, that you do not believe in progress." This is regarded as biting irony to which there can be no reply. It is worth noticing too, that the word "believe" is not used carelessly as in: "I do not believe in Sunday cinemas," but deliberately as in "I believe in God." These assumptions are to be found not only in those who have rejected the Christian doctrine of the Fall, but in practising Christians. They are not infrequently to be found in serious preaching from Christian churches—indeed, a good collection of Pelagian mottoes could be made from Wayside Pulpits.

The assumptions of Pelagianism have been absorbed so thoroughly by many people that they do not realise they are assumptions at all. But in the case of Wells a philosophical explanation would probably be put forward in the Darwinian theory of Natural Selection, the survival of the fittest. In this way even Progress is seen as a result of chance, and the future of Man, though dazzling, is still without purpose. An alternative theory arose therefore which saw purpose in evolution and, by implication, in the future of Man. It was called Creative Evolution, and its chief literary exponent was Bernard Shaw. I do not think this theory ever took hold of Shaw passionately, as did his concern with politics and his innate evangelism, but he wrote his longest play about it so it is not to be ignored. If *Back to Methuselah* was an attempt to create an imaginative vision of the Utopia produced by the Life-Force, as compared with that produced by the Wellsian "Spirit of Man," it failed. Shaw, indeed, was almost as unhappy in finding a symbol for progressive man as was Wells in *The Food of the Gods*. The way in which the Life-Force works upon those who submit to its will is to make them live for three hundred years. That this is partly intended as a joke in order to make ordinary mortals of three-score and ten look like children, does not excuse the feebleness of the symbol.

The play starts in the Garden of Eden. It is worth pointing out that there is no Fall in this Garden. I do not think, however, that this should be regarded as particularly significant. It seems to me of greater importance that the part played by the snake is to introduce Adam and Eve to sex, which looks as if Shaw had fallen into the common misapprehension of regarding the first sin as sexual. This section contains some of Shaw's most attractive prose.

Then comes the discovery that if only men can learn thoroughly and completely to will it they can live three hundred years. (The willing is done unconsciously, by the way.) The first two people to do so are a parlourmaid and a curate. The curate becomes an archbishop three times, and also a general and a president. Each time, on reaching the official age of seventy or eighty, he leaves his clothes on the beach, is presumed drowned, and turns up somewhere else under another name. The archbishop and the parlourmaid, now a member of the Cabinet, marry, and so start a race of long-living children. For a while Shaw has his joke. The long-livers settle in Ireland; ordinary mortals go on as before, though the centre of the British Empire moves from London to Baghdad. But in the final section the tone becomes grimly serious. Here we have Shaw's Utopia—not to be taken too literally, perhaps, but still a significant symbol of the progress of Man as Shaw sees it. In this world, as far into the future "as thought can reach," we are presented with the furthest development of the human race which the Life-Force and Shaw can devise—further development still is inevitable Shaw believes, but this is beyond his power of imagination. In this world children are born, fully grown, from eggs. (This is an effective stage device, of course, and should not be taken as biological prophecy! But at the same time, it indicates Shaw's instinctive mistrust of the body.) Into an adolescence of four years they pack all the things which for most people make life worth living: friendship, love, health, beauty of body, art, religion, joy in the natural world, etc. Then they grow up. They cease to talk or to associate with others. They do not sleep. Their bodies shrivel, and become ugly and impervious to the weather. They grow practically blind and deaf through disuse of their senses. They take no notice of the people or the world about them, till gradually they become disgusting, shrunken, egocentric creatures whose one desire is to become "a vortex" of pure thought. You can't help wondering what they are going to think about without the data provided by the created world through the senses. Shaw only drops one hint—sometimes they think about numbers. Perhaps he really believes that the contemplation of numbers is a higher, nobler, more profound, more satisfying, more inspiring, more adult occupation than the study of the music of Bach, the poetry of Shakespeare or the theology of Aquinas, or even the plays of Bernard Shaw. Or perhaps he doesn't.



This then is where the Life-Force has brought us. *Back to Methuselah*, for all its length and its long digressions, is a witty and entertaining work. Mr. Shaw deserves respect, too, for the logic with which he has worked out to their conclusion the implications of his own philosophy. The Pelagian world is seen to lead inevitably to a state in which morals, religion, art, beauty do not matter because there are no ultimate values, no transcendent being, by which they can be shown to matter. *Back to Methuselah*, for all its perversity and leg-pulling, is a more honest picture of the Pelagian Utopia than the Wellsian sky-scrapers and sunrise, but it has not appealed nearly so much to the popular fancy.

## NATURAL MAN

## 7

*Natural Man*

IN the writers whom we must now consider there was a swing over from the assumptions and beliefs of the realists. Instead of Pelagian Man, we get Natural Man; instead of Liberalism, Totalitarianism. Since I have defined the Pelagianism of the realists as the denial of the doctrine of Original Sin, it may be as well to consider Natural Man, in the same terms. Natural Man, then, is Man in his first innocence, before the Fall. If a Fall is envisaged at all, it is believed not to have taken place in Man's nature, but merely in society. The return to the state of the first grace, the return to Eden is to be achieved, therefore, by the revolt against society and institutions and by the return to the primitive.

Such a conception is not new, not even new to the English novel. It is to be found as long ago as 1698 in Aphra Behn's *Orinooko, or The History of the Royal Slave*. In this novel is presented "the first state of innocence, before man knew how to sin; and it is most evident and plain, that simple nature is the most harmless, inoffensive, and virtuous mistress. It is she alone, if she were permitted, that better instructs the world, than all the inventions of man: religion would here but destroy that tranquillity they possess by ignorance; and laws would but teach them to know offence, of which now they have no notion."

This idea was developed much further in the writers of the Romantic Movement, in whom Impulse was regarded as the voice of Natural Man, not necessarily speaking in contradiction to Reason, but co-operating with it, as it were, to attain the full development of the individual.

Much of this is to be found in the moderns like D. H. Lawrence, Henri de Montherlant, the early Aldous Huxley, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. Here, in varying appearances, are primitivism, revolt against institutions, and emphasis on

impulse. There is also one great difference. The Romantic writers still preserved the sense of Christian values, even when they had rejected Christian doctrine; they still conceived Man as having his true reality in relation to a world of transcendent being. The modern romantics do not. For them, on the whole, there are no transcendent values, and Man therefore becomes a highly developed animal fulfilling his natural impulses or being frustrated in them.

With Lawrence and others like him this is not entirely the case. Lawrence may not have accepted the specifically Christian valuation of human life, but he did not reject spiritual values altogether; indeed, in contrast with the work of the realists, he seems to emphasise them. But with writers like Hemingway, the purely animal attributes of Natural Man are the main concern. For these the image of Natural Man as man in the state of first innocence may be misleading, not because it is untrue to their beliefs, but because the idea of the Fall and of Eden brings into the mind associations which are better forgotten if we are to understand their work. With all these writers, Lawrence included, the emphasis which has been on *emotion* in the Romantic Movement was now on *sensation*.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to notice that two prose styles were evolved—the rich, sensuous prose of Lawrence to suit the romantic and emotional aspects of Natural Man, and the stripped prose of Hemingway, to suit the animal aspects.

The reaction from the work and thought of the realists took many forms. There was the return to the backwoods in revolt against an urbanised civilisation. There was the cult of primitive art, and renewed interest in folklore and anthropology. There was the cult of the irrational, from surrealism to the Marx Brothers. But in one point, very important for our study, these writers were in agreement with those of the previous generation. Both Natural Man and Pelagian Man are conceived as Unfallen, with no moral conflict in their nature. Despite an almost complete reversal of all other beliefs, the two groups of thinkers have this fundamental dogma in common. D. H. Lawrence and H. G. Wells are mirror twins.

<sup>1</sup> Further consideration of this may be found in the most interesting critical article, "The Natural Man and the Political Man," by Edwin Muir, in *New Writing and Daylight*, Summer, 1942.

## Lawrence

NEARLY all the characteristics of the revolt against the style and thought of the realists are to be found in the work of D. H. Lawrence. For this reason, and because he was a writer of genius, Lawrence makes a very convenient introduction to the modern literary cult of Natural Man. In Lawrence the purely literary aspects of the revolt are seen to proceed naturally from his ways of thought. It must be remembered, however, that many of the literary devices and forms which he and others helped to develop have been used by writers who hold very different doctrine as to the nature of Man. Thus the prose of Gertrude Stein was adopted at times by Joyce (in particular in the last chapter of *Ulysses*), and Symbolism in poetry, a by-product of the cult of the irrational, suggested the method on which the greatest religious poet of our time based "The Waste Land," and later the more doctrinally Christian poems of the "Burnt Norton" series.

When Lawrence first appeared as a novelist in 1911 it was not evident that he was going to break away from the realist tradition. The first three novels were written in what seems to be at first the manner of Bennett or Wells. *Sons and Lovers*, in particular, starts with the familiar method of giving briefly the history of the parents of the chief character, and then following his development from infancy to manhood. The sequence of working-class childhood, Board school, secondary school, study at home, college, first love affair, etc., is very much what you might expect from a contemporary of Edwin Clayhanger or Mr. Lewisham. Yet these novels were received with enthusiasm, at any rate by the more perceptive critics. *The Trespasser*, which now seems very slight for Lawrence, received such praise as to make us realise how dull must have been the fiction of a time in which that book was outstanding. The critics were right in that a new life had come into the novel, but it was not to revitalise the old realist novel, but to build up a new type of novel. *The White Peacock* and *The Trespasser* were notable among the fiction of their time because of the vividness of their descriptions. All sense impressions, all

experiences, things seen and heard or felt and imagined, seemed to react on Lawrence like a jab on a raw nerve. The reader got the sensation direct on his own finger-tips, like a blind man reading Braille. We can see now that Lawrence was not, as it then seemed, concerned with the outward appearance of things. This new vitality was due to his concern with the attributes of Natural Man, the sensual and animal attributes, and especially with sex, which seemed to him the central attribute.

Nevertheless, for most of his earlier work he used a setting which Wells, Galsworthy and even Bennett might rightly envy. Lawrence was born in 1885 at Eastwood, a colliery village near Nottingham, on the Derbyshire border. There he grew up in the rough, self-contained life of a small industrial town. He was thrown hard against the bright squalor of pits and pubs, Nonconformist chapels and nineteenth-century workers' cottages. He knew too the country just round the corner, and the contrast, as sharp here as anywhere on earth, cut him to the quick. All his life Lawrence tried to escape from the urban and industrial civilisation which was a horror to him, but never did he escape. He travelled to Ceylon, Australia, Mexico, but always he returned to England or Europe, and in his mind he went back to Derbyshire. It may be that Eastwood and such colliery villages symbolised the conflict which he saw everywhere between urban and rural, civilised and primitive. Derbyshire was the scene of *The White Peacock* and of three out of his next four novels, and, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, almost at the end of his life, he returned there again. There is for me no more poignant setting in modern literature than the old country house, now practically surrounded by collieries, and the wood of stumps of trees which were cut down during the war.

Of all the novels, *Sons and Lovers* gives the most complete picture of the Derbyshire colliery countryside and of the life of the working people who live there. It introduces, too, one of Lawrence's chief themes—the Œdipus problem. The story is simple in outline. Paul Morell is a favourite son. The father is a collier, coarse, rough, sometimes brutal, though Lawrence has given him humour and honesty which make him, quite unintentionally, the most likeable character in the book for many people. The mother is a more sensitive, cultured type. As she has no sympathy from her husband, she turns to Paul. He is working in

Nottingham, but is studying and writing. He has made friends with a girl, Miriam, from a farm near the village. The friendship develops into an unsatisfactory love affair, for the failure of which Paul blames Miriam's lack of physical response. Rather against her will, she agrees to be his mistress, but things go no better. He has another love affair in which there is certainly no lack of response on the part of the woman, but this too peters out, and it is obvious that his emotional life is devoted primarily to his mother. She falls ill, and is dying slowly of cancer, when he gives her an overdose of sleeping draught. Finally, with his mother gone, he is left "derelict."

It is very clear when you read this book that it matters what the characters do. It is not very clear why, nor by what code their actions are to be judged, but they are certainly not moving merely with the pattern of a story, like the characters in the later novels of Galsworthy. The centre of interest had shifted from society to the individual, and the importance of the actions was no longer judged mainly in relation to society. This can be seen by comparing *Sons and Lovers* with *The Lovely Lady*, a later story. *Sons and Lovers* has this in common with the realists, that it shows the lives of Paul Morell and his mother moulded by circumstances which they cannot control, and for which neither they nor anybody else (unless it be, inadvertently, the father) are to blame. They are as helpless in the grip of these circumstances as are some of Galsworthy's characters in the grip of the economic or judicial system. *The Lovely Lady* deals with a theme similar to that of *Sons and Lovers*, the hold of the mother over the son in a way which emotionally bleeds the latter and makes him unable to face the world as an adult, and, in particular, to face the responsibility of the love of women. But in *The Lovely Lady* this situation is the result of a deliberate choice on the part of the mother, a choice which Lawrence condemns in some of his most caustic writing. For years this had been on his mind almost to the extent of an obsession (we find it even in that very early work, *A Collier's Friday Night*, which was not published until 1934), but the memory of his own mother was so precious to him that when dealing with the theme in fiction he would never deliberately lay the blame on the mother until *The Lovely Lady*, and then only when he had created a character so unlike Mrs. Morell that there was no danger of her being recognised, even by Lawrence himself.

*Sons and Lovers* came out at a time when much interest was being taken in psycho-analysis, and it was accepted as illustrating Freud's theory of the Œdipus Complex. The influence of psycho-analysis on Lawrence cannot be ignored, of course, but I doubt whether his novels would have been much different if he had never heard of Freud. In any case, it will be more convenient to consider this later in this chapter when dealing with Lawrence's revolt against scientific rationalism.

It is obvious that Lawrence was not going to be satisfied to present Natural Man as a breathing, eating, lusting, fighting animal, as did Ernest Hemingway in his earlier work. He was, from the first, looking about him for some way to give purpose and significance to Man. So in the end, did Hemingway, turning to politics. But Lawrence found purpose by drawing on a mystical faith in the values of blood and soil—a faith which had appeared among the Rousseau romantics, and which has its obvious connection with Fascism, though it would be a mistake to presume that if Lawrence were alive to-day he would be a Nazi. This mystical significance of Man appeared for the first time in *The Rainbow*, and from then onwards it was scarcely ever forgotten. We can never say that Lawrence's characters are creatures which go about their actions without it mattering tuppence what they do. Often, indeed, every action is of such importance that life seems to be weighed down and half-stifled under the tremendous significance of every little movement or word. The characters seem to be living in air heavy with electricity which the wave of a hand or the glance of an eye may stir up to strike as lightning.

In the opening paragraphs of *The Rainbow* this new mystical significance is set forth, almost as in a manifesto:

"The Brangwens had lived for generations on the Marsh Farm, in the meadows where the Erewash twisted sluggishly through alder trees, separating Derbyshire from Nottinghamshire. Two miles away, a church-tower stood on a hill, the houses of the little country town climbing assiduously up to it. Whenever one of the Brangwens in the fields lifted his head from his work, he saw the church-tower at Ilkeston in the empty sky. So that as he turned again to the horizontal land, he was aware of something standing above him and beyond him in the distance. . . .

"So the Brangwens came and went without fear of necessity,

working hard because of the life that was in them, not for want of the money. Neither were they thrifless. They were aware of the last halfpenny, and instinct made them not waste the peeling of their apple, for it would help to feed the cattle. But heaven and earth was teeming around them, and how should this cease? They felt the rush of sap in spring, they knew the wave which cannot halt, but every year throws forward the seed to begetting, and, falling back, leaves the young-born on the earth. They knew the intercourse between heaven and earth, sunshine drawn into the breast and bowels, the rain sucked up in the day-time, nakedness that comes under the wind in autumn, showing the birds' nests no longer worth hiding. Their life and inter-relations were such; feeling the pulse and body of the soil, that opened to their furrow for the grain, and became smooth and supple after their ploughing, and clung to their feet with a weight that pulled like desire, lying hard and unresponsive when the crops were to be shorn away. The young corn waved and was silken, and the lustre slid along the limbs of the men who saw it. They took the udder of the cows, the cows yielded milk and pulse against the hands of the men, the pulse of the blood of the teats of the cows beat into the pulse of the hands of the men. They mounted their horses, and held life between the grip of their knees, they harnessed their horses at the wagon, and, with hand on the bridle-rings, drew the heaving of the horses after their will. . . .

"The women were different. On them too was the drowse of blood-intimacy, calves sucking and hens running together in droves, and young geese palpitating in the hand while the food was pushed down their throttle. But the women looked out from the heated, blind intercourse of farm-life, to the spoken world beyond. They were aware of the lips and the mind of the world speaking and giving utterance, they heard the sound in the distance, and they strained to listen."<sup>1</sup>

This, in the first two pages of *The Rainbow*, was already the mature Lawrence. The prose has great beauty, though it is overcharged with words and meaning, and has not the lightness of Lawrence's descriptions of flowers and natural scenery. The vividness, even violence of the sensual imagery is inescapable—see especially the young geese in the last paragraph quoted. And the

<sup>1</sup> *The Rainbow* (Heinemann).



air is heavy with sex, although there is not a direct reference to it in the whole passage. Sex was to Lawrence the central experience by which this blood-and-soil mystic could be attained. Later he tried to substitute other means, but even then sex remained his chief preoccupation, emotionally, at any rate. Indeed, Lawrence's emotional and imaginative preoccupation with sex can be seen most when he is writing not primarily about it. In these paragraphs from *The Rainbow*, the men and women are seen as two different sets of creatures, in contact and in conflict each with the other, the sexes segregated, like flocks of chaffinches in winter. Even the relation of the men and women with the animals is seen in a vaguely sexual light (if this is doubted, the reader should look at *St. Mawr*, which to all intents and purposes is about a woman who falls in love with a horse). Above all, fertilisation and seeding in plants is seen largely in sexual imagery. He speaks of "The intercourse between heaven and earth," "sunshine drawn up into the breast and bowels," "nakedness that comes under the wind in autumn," "the pulse and body of the soil," and its "weight that pulled like desire." The relation between the sun and the earth is explained frequently in sexual terms. The sun is male, or a lover, or a father. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* this is expressed so forcibly that quotation of the passage might lead to the banning of an S.C.M. publication for obscenity! In *Sun*, a short story, even sun-bathing is interpreted as a sexual relationship between the sun and a woman:

"She knew the sun in heaven, blue-molten with his white fire edges, throwing off fire. And though he shone on all the world, when she lay unclothed he focussed on her. It was one of the wonders of the sun, he could shine on a million people and still be the radiant, splendid, unique sun, focussed on her alone.

"With her knowledge of the sun, and her conviction that the sun *knew* her, in the cosmic carnal sense of the word, came over her a feeling of detachment from people, and a certain contempt for human beings altogether."<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious that in this passage Lawrence was getting very close to telling in modern terms one of the old pagan sun myths. And in the paragraphs from *The Rainbow* he was getting very close

<sup>1</sup> "Sun," from *The Tales of D. H. Lawrence* (Heinemann).

to the pagan fertility cults. At the time of *The Rainbow* (1915), he did not yet see this. He looked about him for some means other than sex to attain the sense of communion and urgency which he wanted. In *Women in Love* (written, 1916) he experimented with what he called an "ithyphallic" relationship. In *Aaron's Rod* (1922) he tried friendship between two men. But all this time it was becoming clearer that he would have to resort to the primitive. How far he was aware of this when he left Europe in 1922 is not certain. It seems as if his first motive was not so much to go among primitive people as to get away from a civilisation which seemed to him old and worn out. The culture of Europe hung on his shoulders like a second-hand overcoat. Accordingly, he went first to Australia, where he stayed about four months.

The memorial of this visit to Australia is the novel, *Kangaroo*, which contains the superb chapter describing his experiences in Cornwall during the Four Years' War. The most attractive parts of *Kangaroo* are the descriptions of the brand-new little villages of brick and galvanised iron which have sprung up on the shore of the Pacific. But in a study of Lawrence, this book is important because it contains the first appearance of a curious semi-fascist society. This society is rather vague, a sort of cross between a Maori war-dance and a meeting of the Rotary Club, but it shows how Lawrence was finding it necessary to turn to some political or social organisation to justify his blood-and-soil mystic. It did not work, however. The brand-new-ness of Australia did not satisfy Lawrence. He knew now that he must turn to an old and primitive people. He left Australia in August, 1922, and sailed to San Francisco. For the next three years he lived in Mexico and New Mexico, moving from place to place, with one visit to England and Germany.

Mexico was much more fruitful for Lawrence than Australia. It produced many essays, poems, *Mornings in Mexico*, some of his best short stories, and, above all, *The Plumed Serpent*. The latter is the finest English literary product of the cult of the primitive. It tells of Kate, an intelligent, cultured European—who, by the way, is the only one of Lawrence's literary incarnations who is a woman. She goes to Mexico, and there becomes involved with two men, marries one and goes to live with him in a village of the Mexican Indians. The men are connected with a religious-political movement which was to restore the worship of the old

Mexican gods, and to bring about some sort of revolution. There are passages of great beauty describing the assemblies of the movement, with its ritual dances and hymns. But besides the beauty of primitive arts and ritual, there is squalor and brutality. Kate is revolted by the social conditions among the Indians, but she steels herself, endures it, and stays. Lawrence did not stay.

The man whom Kate married was a man of culture, although he had gone to live among the Indians, by whom he was accepted as a leader. But at this time Lawrence symbolised the return to the primitive by stories of cultured women, often of high birth, who give themselves to men of primitive races. This is the subject of two Mexican stories besides *The Plumed Serpent*. *The Princess* is the story of what amounts to a slow and elaborate rape among the mountains. *The Woman Who Rode Away* tells of a woman who is captured by Indians and offered as a sacrifice. She resists at first and then is fascinated by and submits to the slow ritual of preparation. It is one of the most beautifully told of Lawrence's stories.

When he tried to tell the same story with an English setting it was less successful. *The Virgin and the Gipsy* is long and was much praised on its appearance. It is about a girl who is caught in a flood and rescued by a gypsy, with whom she has intercourse as part of the process of the rescue.

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a variation on the same theme. The story, very simply, is of a woman whose husband is paralysed, symbolically as well as actually, from the waist down. She wants a child, and turns for a father to her husband's gamekeeper, who lives in a hut in the woods. The book is an account of their love affair, written with the greatest detail and frankness. He was at the time a very sick man, possibly in mind as well as in body. Something of the despair at his own weakness shows itself in the violence with which he describes the sexual incidents and in his perverse forcing on the reader those words which are forbidden in polite conversation—the famous "Anglo-Saxon monosyllables." What the effect of the book may be on adolescents or (to use Auden's phrase) on "smut-hounds," I do not know, but on the sympathetic reader the effect is neither of disgust nor of erotic excitement; it is of profound sadness. Hemingway may have shown Natural Man in more aspects, as a fighting, hating, fearing animal as well as a lusting one; de Montherlant has shown

more thoroughly the lusting, promiscuous side of Natural Man; but in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is to be found the most complete attempt yet made to portray Natural Man entirely in sexual terms, and to put forward sexual love as the key to all experience. At the end of the book Lady Chatterley and her lover decide to go away together. Lawrence makes us believe that this is the gate to all happiness, that this is the ultimate right choice. We cannot believe this, not even within the framework of the novel, after such violence beforehand. And we cannot feel that Lawrence altogether believed it, either, however passionately he may have forced himself to think so.



Closely linked with the cult of the primitive was the cult of the irrational. In many ways this was a necessary and inevitable reaction to scientific rationalism of the realists. During the last few centuries there has developed a tendency to think that truth is only to be known in the sphere of science, and by science is meant the art of recording and measuring natural phenomena. Thus that a halfpenny is an inch across is "true"; that the "Mona Lisa" is beautiful is "a matter of opinion." The effect on the arts of this unconscious belief is clear: the concerns of poetry, religion and so on are not true. The voyage of the Ancient Mariner could not have happened. The imaginative life of poetry becomes at best only a fairy tale to be indulged in for its own sake. Clearly such a mental atmosphere was not likely to be productive of great poetry, and there are no great poets among the realists. The revolt against the confinement of thought within the limits of dry materialism was headed, naturally enough, by the poet and the metaphysician. But later on they were joined by the scientists too, for the development of psycho-analysis and anthropology shows that scientists were beginning to realise that there were more things in the universe than could be put in a test-tube or measured by calipers. The cult of the irrational took many forms, some of which may scarcely seem to deserve to be called irrational. There was surrealism and its allied -isms: dada-ism, symbolism, etc. There was psycho-analysis, and the study of the unconscious mind and its symbols. There was the revived interest in myth and folk-lore and what is called the "racial mind." And there was the deliberate

seeking for mindlessness, the "blood consciousness" instead of the head consciousness. This, like the interest in myth, is obviously closely connected with primitivism. The direct influence of Freud on Lawrence can be seen most clearly in *Sons and Lovers*. There is no doubt that this novel was largely autobiographical, and that Lawrence's pre-occupation with the problem of the mother-complex was due to his recognising it as his own problem. Judging from the many times in which he returns to this Œdipus theme, it seems likely that he would have been concerned with it even if he had never read Freud. Freud, however, helped him to understand his own case, and to some extent Lawrence may be regarded as having psycho-analysed himself.

Round about this time the use of psycho-analysis in literary criticism had become very popular. Lawrence wrote a book of essays on American Classic literature, in which, among other things, Moby Dick is interpreted as a sex symbol. The essays, nevertheless, have their touch of strange genius and are valuable even if only for what they reveal of Lawrence. Later he applied the same methods to the Revelation of St. John. In some cases, as with Barrie, and Lawrence himself, psycho-analysis is obviously of great use in the interpretation of their work, but on the whole psycho-analytical literary criticism became a sort of game and one which tried to discover hidden significance in everything from Shakespeare's plays to *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. The results were often amusing, can scarcely ever have done any harm and sometimes revealed something worth knowing, but on the whole it distracted attention from more important things. The psycho-analytical critic is often like a hound following a trail, nose to the ground, never noticing the scenery around him.

*Sons and Lovers*, *The Lovely Lady*, *A Collier's Friday Night*, *My Son's My Son* are obvious cases where Lawrence constructed his story on a Freudian theme. In many other novels and stories he introduces episodes which were intended to appeal to the subconscious mind. This appeal has always been present in poetry, and also in much fiction (fairy tales, Gothic horror stories, etc.), but Lawrence introduced it more deliberately.

He did this with varying success. I do not want it to be thought that I am suggesting a new analysis or theory of literary inspiration, but for convenience we may say that in a writer there is a creator and a critic. If the writer's subconscious is to express itself

it will do so through the creator—the critic will look on and interpret or put in order. If the writer's subconscious is to throw up an image which will evoke response in the subconscious of the reader, the writer *as a creator* must be unconscious of what he is doing, though *as a critic* he may understand well enough. The trouble arises when the conscious critic sets out to invent an image which will have symbolic significance. The result is artificial, lifeless, and often rather grotesque.

This can be seen by a study of several passages in which Lawrence writes of horses. The horse is a well-known symbol. It is interpreted by the Freudians as having a sexual significance, but it has also a wider significance, not fully understood, which nevertheless stirs us strangely in poetry and art.

In *St. Mawr* Lawrence the critic sets out with the Freudian interpretation in his mind to make up a story about a horse. But the symbol has not really caught fire in the mind of Lawrence the creator. As a result, the horse never takes on real symbolical significance, but becomes a sort of grotesque caricature of Lawrence himself. In his identification of himself with the horse Lawrence even goes so far as to make the wretched animal have no foals *because it doesn't want to*. (Lawrence, it should be remembered, had no children, nor did many of his characters.) But though the horse never comes to life in the mind of Lawrence the creator, Lawrence the critic labours on and on at his theme in some of the worst prose he ever wrote, flogging a dead horse:

"It haunted her, the horse. It had looked at her as she had never been looked at before: terrible, gleaming, questioning eyes arching out of darkness, and backed by all the fire of that great ruddy body. What did it mean, and what ban did it put upon her? She felt it put a ban upon her heart: wielded some uncanny authority over her, that she dared not, could not understand."<sup>1</sup>

But when the creator and critic are balanced in power and working in co-operation the result is very successful as in the last chapter of *The Rainbow*. Here the horse symbol has taken a thorough hold of Lawrence's imagination, and he writes with great evocative power. A young girl is walking through fields at night:

<sup>1</sup> *St. Mawr*.

"Suddenly she knew there was something else. Some horses were looming in the rain, not near yet. But they were going to be near. She continued her path, inevitably. They were horses in the lee of a clump of trees beyond, above her. She pursued her way with bent head. She did not want to lift her face to them. She did not want to know they were there. She went on in the wild track."

She goes on and the horses begin to gallop about the field:

"Cruelly, they swerved and crashed by her on her left hand. She saw the fierce flanks crinkled and as yet inadequate, the great hoofs flashing bright as yet only brandished about her, and one by one the horses crashed by, intent, working themselves up.

"They had gone by, brandishing themselves thunderously about her, enclosing her. They slackened their burst transport, they slowed down, and cantered together into a knot once more, in the corner by the gate and the trees ahead of her. They stirred, they moved uneasily, they settled their uneasy flanks into one group, one purpose. They were up against her."

She gets to the foot of an oak tree, and climbs it desperately in the darkness and drops on the other side of the hedge away from the horses.

This is a passage which cannot easily be forgotten. We feel the girl's terror. The horses are quite real horses, able to run and bite and kick, but they are also symbols which echo deep in the subconscious mind. And Lawrence the critic has made it plain that they symbolise the physical world that the girl is still afraid of, the world of sex and blood.

In *Women in Love* there is yet another horse scene. The two sisters, Ursula and Gudrun are going home in the afternoon, and are held up at the railway crossing in the village street because a colliery train is passing. Gerald Crich comes up on his mare and talks to the girls. The horse shies at the train, but Gerald pulls it back and holds it with its head to the crossing gate:

"Gudrun was looking at him [Gerald] with black-dilated, spellbound eyes. But he sat glistening and obstinate, forcing the wheeling mare, which spun and swerved like a wind, and yet could not get out of the grasp of his will, nor escape from the mad clamour of terror that resounded through her, as the trucks

thumped slowly, heavily, horrifying, one after the other, one pursuing the other, over the rails of the crossing.

"The locomotive, as if wanting to see what could be done, put on the brakes, and back came the trucks rebounding on the iron buffers, striking like horrible cymbals, clashing nearer and nearer in frightful strident concussions. The mare opened her mouth and rose slowly, as if lifted up on a wind of terror. Then suddenly her forefeet struck out, as she convulsed herself utterly away from the horror. Back she went, and the two girls clung to each other, feeling she must fall backwards on top of him. But he leaned forward, his face shining with fixed amusement, and at last he brought her down, sank her down, and was bearing her back to the mark. But as strong as the pressure of his compulsion was the repulsion of her utter terror, throwing her back and away from the railway, so that she spun round and round, on two legs, as if she were in the centre of some whirlwind."

It seems to me that the creator in *Lawrence* got out of hand here, and the critic could not control him. It is quite possible to make some explanation of the scene. For one thing, the episode takes its rightful place in the story as a case of the man showing off before the two girls. No doubt it also symbolises the struggle between the conscious will and brute, or natural, fear, and the emphasis on the sex of the mare should also be noticed. But the scene has an importance in the scheme of the book greater than can easily be explained. To interpret fully the power of this scene you have to be a psycho-analyst, not a literary critic. This applies still more to another scene in the book, that in which Birkin stones the reflection of the moon in the pond.

*Lawrence* tried also to describe his characters in terms belonging more to the subconscious realm of the mind than to the conscious personality. The realist novelists nearly always gave their men and women a set of external characteristics—red hair, a club foot, a way of walking, a manner of speech—which together add up to a personality easy to be recognised. It is a method not confined to the realists, of course, but one used excellently by novelists like Dickens and Thackeray who were certainly concerned with more than mere outward appearances. But *Lawrence* was not primarily interested in the thoughts, ideas, habits and eccentricities which go to make the average personality, at any rate on the surface.



He wanted to penetrate to the deeper strata of the personality which existed in that part of the mind below the level of consciousness, or perhaps, as it seemed to him, not in the mind at all, but in the body—hence his later rather perverse insistence on the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. This meant that he had to deny himself in his novels all those distractions of conversation and caricature which are a main part of the entertainment to be had from fiction. As a result, his novels (or the best of them) have a strange power, but they are somewhat monotonous and ask hard work from the reader, and his characters are hard to tell apart. This is particularly so of *Women in Love*, where the pair of sisters and their two lovers have so little outward distinguishing marks of appearance, habit or conversation, that it is very difficult to know which of them is speaking or thinking without reference directly to their names.

Lawrence explains his attitude to character in a letter to Edward Garnett:

“ . . . But somehow—that which is psychic—non-human, in humanity, is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element—which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent. The certain moral scheme is what I object to. In Turgenev, and in Tolstoi, and in Dostoievsky, the moral scheme into which all the characters fit—and it is nearly the same scheme—is, whatever the extraordinariness of the characters themselves, dull, old, dead.”

Here Lawrence puts his finger on the point where he and others departed from the traditional conception of Man. They saw Natural Man living in no moral scheme at all, and carrying out his natural desires with reference to nothing but the material circumstances which fulfilled them or frustrated them.

Lawrence then goes on, logically, to describe character as it appears to him:

“I don’t so much care what the woman *feels*—in the ordinary usage of the word. That presumes an *ego* to feel with. I only care about what the woman *is*—what she *is*—inhumanly, physiologically, materially—according to the use of the word: but for me, what she *is* as a phenomenon (or as representing some greater,

inhuman will), instead of what she feels according to the human conception.”

Then he shows how he visualises his novels with this conception of character in mind, and how he would wish to be understood:

“You mustn’t look in my novel for the old stable *ego* of the character. There is another *ego*, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we’ve been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond—but I say, ‘Diamond, what! This is carbon.’ And my diamond might be coal or soot, and my theme is carbon.) . . . Again I say, don’t look for the development of the novel<sup>1</sup> to follow the lines of certain characters: the characters fall into the form of some other rhythmic form, as when one draws a fiddle-bow across a fine tray delicately sanded, the sand takes lines unknown.”<sup>2</sup>



Psycho-analysis was used by Lawrence for yet another purpose. At the age of about thirty-five he found it necessary to try to explain himself, or at any rate to deduce from his experiences something of an ordered mental attitude towards himself and things in general. The result was the curious *Fantasia of the Unconscious*. For this psycho-analysis provided the terminology and the framework for some of the arguments, though Lawrence probably departed very far from the theories of Freud or Jung or Adler. That did not worry him, however, and it need not worry us. The *Fantasia* does not give the “theory” on which the novels were written. Lawrence wrote to no conscious theory. He himself expressed the relationship between the novels and the theorising of the *Fantasia*:

“This pseudophilosophy of mine—‘pollyanalytics,’ as one of my respected critics might say—is deduced from the novels and

<sup>1</sup> *The Rainbow*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, edited by Aldous Huxley (Heinemann).

poems, not the reverse. The novels and poems come unwatched out of one's pen. . . . The novels and poems are pure passionate experience. These 'pollyanalytics' are inferences made afterwards, from the experience."<sup>1</sup>

Much of this book deals with the problem of the mother-complex, and with the blood-and-soil mystic—here more blood than soil. But at the moment I want to emphasise how it played its part in the revolt against scientific rationalism. Lawrence is anxious to say that the experiences of the imagination, of poetry and dream and myth and legend, ought not to be disregarded entirely for the rule and line of scientific experiment. Moreover, he is not prepared to defend this on his own ground only, in fiction, art and folklore, he goes right into the enemy's camp, into astronomy, where the scientist has more reason than usual to claim exclusive rights. He does this knowing that he is being perverse, that he is kicking against the habit of thought of his times. Indeed, the whole book has a rather petulant, argumentative tone about it, with a good deal of impish humour. Over and over he keeps anticipating objections and refusing to notice them:

"If my reader finds this bosh and abracadabra, all right for him. Only I have no more regard for his little crowings on his own dunghill."<sup>2</sup>

And again:

"But remember, dear reader, please, that there is not the slightest need for you to believe me, or even read me. Remember, it's just your own affair. Don't implicate me."<sup>3</sup>

He invents, then, a cosmogony in which the sun is seen as one great pole of the universe and the moon as another, and the earth is between with its living creatures both being maintained by, and *maintaining*, the sun and the moon. He puts out his tongue very amusingly at orthodox astronomers:

"I do not believe one-fifth of what science can tell me about the sun. I do not believe for one second that the moon is a dead

<sup>1</sup> *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (Heinemann).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

world spelched off from our globe. I do not believe that the stars came flying off from the sun like drops of water when you spin your wet hanky. . . . I know that the sun is hot. But I won't be told that the sun is a ball of blazing gas which spins round and fizzes. No, thank you."<sup>1</sup>

Aldous Huxley, in the Preface to his edition of Lawrence's correspondence, tells how at the end of a long argument Lawrence would say: "I don't care about evidence. Evidence doesn't mean anything to me. I don't feel it *here*," and he would press his hands on his solar plexus. There is a good deal about the solar plexus in *Fantasia*, and about the lumbar ganglion, the cardiac plexus and the thoracic ganglion. For my part, I am so ignorant about anatomy, that I do not know even whether such things exist, but I can see the curious resemblance between Lawrence's physiology and the mediæval theory of humours. This is important, however, because it is an attempt to explain the long search which Lawrence was making towards mindlessness, towards a consciousness that was not mental. The characters of his novels went in search of it, in sex, in ritual, in primitive life and elsewhere. Then he began to create for himself symbolic characters, made up from scraps of legend or myth. Very little is known of the Etruscans except that the Romans had called them vicious. But that was enough for Lawrence:

"Were they then vicious, the slender, tender-footed  
Long-nosed men of Etruria?

Or was their way only evasive and different, dark,  
like cypress-trees in a wind?"<sup>2</sup>

Inevitably, however, this seeking after the non-human led away from human things to animals. In them, it seemed he would find a true non-mental consciousness. He spoke with affection of the cow, Susan, whom he owned in Mexico, admiring the way in which she could "be." With other animals it was the same:

"The soft, the secret, the unfathomable blood  
The cat has lapped;  
And known it subtler than frisson-shaken nerves,  
Stronger than multiplicity of bone on bone,

<sup>1</sup> *Fantasia of the Unconscious*.

<sup>2</sup> "Cypresses," from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*.

And darker than even the arrows of violentest will  
Can pierce, for that is where will gives out, like a  
sinking stone that can sink no further.”<sup>1</sup>

But even the consciousness of the animals seemed in the end too mental, and Lawrence turned from them to plants, flowers and trees.

Here is the fig:

“Folded upon itself, and secret unutterable,  
And milky-sapped, sap that curdles milk and makes *ricotta*,  
Sap that smells strange on your fingers, that even goats  
won’t taste it;  
Folded upon itself, enclosed like any Mohammedan woman,  
Its nakedness all within walls, its flowering forever unseen.”<sup>2</sup>

Inevitably this progress from the consciousness\* (so far as it can be called conscious) of the beasts and the flowers passed to the “consciousness” which is not conscious at all, to pure oblivion:

“And if, as autumn deepens and darkens  
I feel the pain of falling leaves, and stems that break  
in storms  
and trouble and dissolution and distress  
and then the softness of deep shadows folding, folding  
around my soul and spirit, around my lips  
so sweet, like a swoon, or more like the drowse of a  
low, sad song  
singing darker than the nightingale, on, on to the solstice  
and the silence of short days, the silence of the year,  
the shadow,  
then I shall know that my life is moving still  
with the dark earth, and drenched  
with the deep oblivion of earth’s lapse and renewal.”<sup>3</sup>

This is the oblivion of sleep, with immersion in the waiting and resting of Nature in winter, with its promise of spring and renewal, of “odd, wintry flowers upon the withered stem.” But in the lovely

<sup>1</sup> “He-Goat,” from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*.

<sup>2</sup> “Figs,” from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*.

<sup>3</sup> “Shadows,” from *Last Poems*.

"Ship of Death," one of the last things Lawrence ever wrote, the oblivion is of death:

"Build then the ship of death, for you must take  
the longest journey to oblivion."

And:

"And everything is gone, the body is gone  
completely under, gone, entirely gone.  
The upper darkness is heavy as the lower,  
between them the little ship  
is gone

It is the end, it is oblivion."<sup>1</sup>

And this is the end to which Lawrence's denial of the intellect has brought him, to the negation of all consciousness, to the negation of all life, to death. His genius draws him to the logical conclusion of his thought, to the death-will.

Lawrence was not a religious man in the sense of one who believes that besides Man and the World there is a world of transcendent being—in other words, God—in relation to which Man's life has meaning. Instead, he was what Aldous Huxley calls a sort of "mystical materialist." But he was religious in that he looked at the created world with wonder and awe and was always ready to bow down and worship. He created for himself a religion of wonder, image and myth. It is quite impossible to deduce from his works any clear outline of it, and there is scarcely any statement which he makes which is not contradicted elsewhere. Yet there is no doubt what his religion was; it was Dualism, the belief in two primal powers, good and evil. Even the vagueness and contradictions are characteristic of many forms of Dualism, particularly of Gnosticism, which was not so much a religion as a common way of thought which bound together many religions, mythologies and fertility cults. In Lawrence the created world and the whole of human and non-human experience was divided into good and evil, light and dark, white and black, spirit and body, life and death. This conception of the universe can be seen, conscious or unconscious, behind all his description of the natural world. The most complete expression of it to be found in Lawrence's work comes almost by accident in *The Plumed Serpent*.

<sup>1</sup> "The Ship of Death," from *Last Poems*.

The two men with whom Kate is concerned, who become leaders of the primitive religio-political cult, impersonate one the sun god and the other the moon god in the rituals of the Mexican Indians. Hence they become, as it were, incarnations of the sun and the moon, the day and the night, light and dark, the two primal spirits. And Kate finds that each of them is necessary to her, neither is complete without the other.

It is not often that Lawrence depicted the two powers equally. Usually he emphasised the dark, the sensual, for he believed that the light, the spiritual, had been the preoccupation of civilised man during the Christian era, and that it was his mission to preach the Dark Gods and so restore the balance to life. But though he talks little about the light and spiritual it is always assumed as the complement of the dark and sensual.

This conception of the whole of life and the created world as a conflict between the two powers, the two aspects of reality, governed every moment of his experience. All his imagery is coloured by it: the body ruled by the impulses of the four nerve centres, pulling against each other in pairs; the earth hanging in space in the magnetic field between the sun and the moon. Above all, it coloured his attitude to sex. For sex is not only, for Lawrence, the central experience by which we approach the mystical communion of blood and soil, or by which we can be admitted into the primitive life of uncivilised tribes, or by which we escape from conscious thought; it is essentially the dominant symbol in his mind. Lawrence tended to see everything in sexual imagery, and to express everything in sexual terms. Sex is seen by him as a conflict between two creatures, different from each other and in some ways irreconcilable. He himself gives a definition of sex:

“Sex means the being divided into male and female, and the magnetic desire or impulse which puts male apart from female, in a negative or sundering magneticism, but which also draws male and female together in a long and infinitely varied approach towards the critical act of coition.”<sup>1</sup>

Here we have not only a duality of species, male and female, but also a duality of impulse, attraction and repulsion. There are times indeed when his solemn persistence on the importance of

<sup>1</sup> *Fantasia of the Unconscious*.

sex strikes the reader as absurd and even comic. When he writes at great length of the sexual relations of tortoises we may forgive him because of a certain touch of humour, but we are bored when he insists on writing like this of whales:

“Then the great bull lies up against his bride  
in the blue deep of the sea  
as mountain pressing on mountain, in the zest of life.”

And we cannot help laughing when he goes on to say:

“And over the bridge of the whale’s strong phallus, linking the wonder of whales  
the burning archangels under the sea keep passing, back and forth.”<sup>1</sup>

In some forms of Gnosticism, notably Manicheism, in which form it made its most deliberate attempt to attach itself to the Christian dogma, Creation is regarded as the work of the Evil Spirit, not the Good. Matter, therefore becomes evil, not good or neutral. I do not think that this doctrine was really held by Lawrence, for he had too much joy in the created world. (It should be remembered, of course, that Lawrence did not really regard his Dark Gods as evil, in the ordinary sense. Evil was to him a thing which was a negation both of the Dark Gods and—to invent a convenient phrase—the Light Gods too.) But even this aspect of Dualism is to be found here and there in his work. In this poem called “When Satan Fell” (and surely even Lawrence can’t speak of Satan without implying a reference to evil) there seems to be a suggestion that at least part of creation was the work of Satan:

“So Satan only fell to keep a balance.  
‘Are you so lofty, O my God?  
Are you so pure and lofty, up aloft?’  
Then I will fall, and plant the paths to hell  
with vines and poppies and fig-trees  
so that lost souls may eat grapes  
and the moist fig  
and put scarlet buds in their hair on the way to hell,  
on the way to dark perdition.’ ”

<sup>1</sup> “Whales Weep Not!” from *Last Poems*.



This may be only a passing thought—Lawrence never claimed to be consistent about small points—but it shows how his thought did correspond with all the main characteristics of dualism.

This belief that creation is the work of the evil spirit, and that matter therefore is evil, is more widespread than is generally thought. Unconsciously it is often at the back of many forms of puritanism, or at any rate it tinges much of the gloomier sort of puritanical thought. On the surface it may seem absurd to accuse Lawrence of puritanism, yet there is a good deal of evidence to show that at heart he was partly an ascetic. The conflict which he saw in the universe around him also went on inside himself. It may be that, as he was subjective in his way of thought, the conflict which he saw around him was really a projection of the conflict which he felt within him. Richard Aldington says that Lawrence was trying to discover what constitutes an ideal marriage. This is over-simplifying the problem, but certainly Lawrence was trying in his way to find a normal life for what he thought was a normal man; to strike a balance between the spiritual and the sensual. But it is obvious that Lawrence was not a normal man, nor even what he thought was a normal man. There was no balance between the spiritual and the sensual in his own life. Probably, as T. S. Eliot says, he was a man who lived almost entirely in the spiritual. He was always complaining that modern people had "sex in the head" instead of wherever it should be. But if anyone ever had sex in the head it was Lawrence himself. Certainly we find over and over again that he forced himself into sex: "I was crucified into sex," he says. He chose deliberately the experiences of the senses as a way to get in touch with his Dark Gods, and from the ferocity of his language it seems very likely that in doing so he was violating at least one side of his nature.

The balance between spiritual and sensual, light and dark, was never achieved by Lawrence in life (and it should be remembered that his way of life was as much a deliberate "work of art" as his writing—he always tried to live his beliefs, even when they drove him among the Mexican Indians), but he did make a last attempt to find it in art. *The Man Who Died* is a parable of this search. It is, of course, blasphemous, yet the blasphemy can be seen more in proportion if we remember that the man who died is identified, not with Jesus, but with Lawrence himself. The story of how the man who died (he is never named) comes to life again after a long

illness, goes wandering into Egypt, and, finally, from a priestess of Isis learns a message of the body instead of the spirit, is an allegory of the spiritual side of Lawrence's nature subduing itself to the sensual.

Because of its use of a (to Lawrence) mythical figure of Jesus this story has given offence to many Christians. There is no need to try to defend it from this point of view, but it should be remembered that the Jesus in Lawrence's mind was a symbol standing not even for Christianity, but rather for the over-spiritualising of life as he saw it.

The manichæan, puritan streak which we find in Lawrence crops up again in other writers of Natural Man. But it is not characteristic of all of them. Indeed, only the emphasis on the natural qualities of Man can be found in all, like a sort of lowest common denominator. But the return to the primitive, the revolt against scientific rationalism or one or another or both are to be found in many more writers of this time, and eventually even in popular thought, for it is important to realise that Natural Man, like Pelagian Man, has become a popular conception.

## *Henri de Montherlant, Aldous Huxley and Others*

HENRI DE MONTHERLANT is the writer who with Lawrence has described Natural Man most thoroughly in his personal and sexual relationships. His tone is very different from that of Lawrence. Here is no mystical faith in blood and soil or in anything else. Here is no faith at all, rather a deliberate and cynical rejection of faith and faiths. Montherlant shows Natural Man not among primitive races or among Europeans who are seeking to escape from their civilisation. His Natural Man is a highly cultured, intellectual product of Western civilisation. He has the greatest contempt for that civilisation and for the conventions and manners of its people, but he does not want to escape from it or reform it. He wants, rather, to take advantage of it for the satisfaction of his desires. He is clever, selfish, unscrupulous, cruel, ready to exploit anyone for his own purposes. He accepts entirely the conception of Man as a being who exists only on one plane, who has no purpose other than the fulfilment of his animal desires, and who can be judged by no code of transcendent values. Following that idea logically to its end, he rejects any pretensions at virtue and is even impatient when he is caught doing something honourable. On the way to a shop to buy a piece of jade, he had met an old woman from whom he used to buy flowers.

“ ‘She talked to me about her two children who are both ill; about her brother’s ill-treatment of her; about her poverty. Bang! I collapsed. I felt ashamed to buy my piece of jade and slipped my 1,000-franc note into her hand. I haven’t got over it yet.’ ”

“ ‘How do you mean?’ ”

“ ‘I haven’t got over the annoyance it caused me to give her the 1,000 francs instead of buying the jade.’ ”

“ ‘Who’s to stop you from buying the jade as well?’ ”

“ ‘Oh, I bought it, of course, but it isn’t the same thing any

more. What annoys me is that I should have given 1,000 francs out of pure charity. It has spoilt the whole week for me.' ”<sup>1</sup>

Montherlant's *Natural Man* is presented in the person of M. Pierre Costals,<sup>2</sup> a novelist. The novels in which he appears were four: *Les Jeunes Filles*, *Pitié pour les Femmes*, *Le Démon du Bien* and *Les Lèpreuses*. Translations of these have been published in England in two volumes, under the titles of *Pity for Women* and *The Lepers*.

The novels are presented in a very individual form, consisting of letters to and from Costals, extracts from his notebook, occasional articles of his, and also narrative in the third person. Despite the fact that the structure of the book lies in the hands of the narrator in the third person, the effect is so strongly autobiographical that when we read at the end of a letter to Costals, "This letter was filed away by the addressee unopened," we wonder for a moment how the narrator can have known what was in it!

This literary device resembles in some ways that used by Defoe, but whereas Defoe wished to create an illusion of factual realism, Montherlant wishes to convince the reader of the complete frankness of his picture of Costals. As Montherlant apparently put some traits of his own character into that of Costals, some people have presumed that Costals was a portrait of himself. It is no part of my purpose to discuss the private life of Henri de Montherlant, but I would point out that his inclusion of autobiographical characteristics in so unpleasant a personality is proof of the scrupulous honesty which was necessary for a picture of *Natural Man* in the circumstances which he envisaged.

At the beginning of *Pity for Women* two women are writing to Costals, who is a brilliant, even notorious, author. One is a young girl, in a Catholic seminary; the other a woman of about thirty. The latter he arranges to meet, and treats her with complete callousness, refusing her love, and forcing her to repress her friendship into strange and unnatural forms. The younger girl, of whom we do not learn a great deal, goes out of her mind in the end. Andrée, the elder, does not go out of her mind, but she works herself into a state of intense nervous unhappiness in which she

<sup>1</sup> *Pity for Women* (Routledge).

<sup>2</sup> He is called Costa in the earlier volumes, but this was changed to avoid giving offence to a man of that name.

begs Costals to take her as his mistress if only for a couple of months, then for a week, and at last for a day—all of which Costals refuses contemptuously. (It is notable that though we are told that Costals had had hundreds of mistresses, two of the three women with whom these books are concerned have no physical intimacy with him.) He does it all the more violently because he has fallen in love (or rather, reached that state of violent attraction which seems the nearest he comes to being in love) with Solange Dandillot, a girl of twenty-one. His excitement about Solange is confused in his mind with his bitterness towards Andrée, and cruelty to the one seems to increase his enjoyment of the other. When at last he plans the final seduction of Solange, he arranges that Andrée shall be present at the same time so that he can sharpen his appetite by the pleasure of being cruel:

“Nevertheless, all these times, Costa[ls] had been smiling at her, and so naturally, that he himself was unaware of the fact. He smiled at her (1) because he was cheerful by nature, and that was the way it expressed itself—a sort of artless vitality, like a blue lightning flash, that can strike a man down; (2) because he was grateful to her for the pleasure he would derive from making her suffer; and (3) because he had never really stopped liking her. (Throughout the whole of their discussions he had never stopped liking her, and that was no doubt one of the reasons why he tormented her.)”<sup>1</sup>

*Pity for Women* ends with the death of Solange’s father, and, as a final touch of cynicism, a letter from Mlle. Marcelle Prie (aged twenty-five) to M. Jacques Picard, Costals’ valet (neither of whom had been mentioned before), asking him not to desert her without one final meeting.

The first part of *The Lepers* is concerned largely with the attempt of Solange and her widowed mother to manoeuvre Costals into marriage. Costals has always maintained most violently that marriage is impossible for a writer. Eventually, after hesitating and changing his mind continually, he agrees to a formal State marriage with the girl. He does this neither out of love nor a sense of duty, nor even pity, but rather out of a perverted sense of self-abasement. His agreement is not very complete, either, and he forces Mme. Dandillot to accept a set of preposterous reservations:

<sup>1</sup> *Pity for Women.*

"There were a number of important things I wanted to say to you, but they've gone out of my mind. . . . Ah, yes, this, for instance. . . . Suppose the husband should forbid the mother-in-law to visit them?<sup>1</sup> Would that too be grounds for automatic divorce?"

"Well, my dear sir, if you've got to that point already."

"Should one not always be prepared for the worst?"

"I've never known a marriage taking place under such conditions," cried Mme. Dandillot, though without animosity, having reached a point where she could only just keep afloat.

"It's you who desire this marriage, not me," said Costals, somewhat dryly.

"My dear sir, if you find the marriage really such a cross to bear . . ."

"No, no," said Costals, looking at the floor. "I only want you to realise your responsibility. . . ."

"Another silence followed. Mme. Dandillot's face had clouded over.

"We are fully agreed," said Costals, "that I shall not be compelled to accompany her when she wants to go out in the evening."

"If you don't want to go out with her some evening, she can go out with me or her friends."

"And there will never be a wireless in the flat."

"She detests the things."

"We shall see hardly anyone. I'm sick and tired already of my own relations."

"We shan't impose our relations on you, or make any attempt to get to know yours," Mme. Dandillot added humbly."<sup>2</sup>

Despite all these precautions, Costals jibs at the last fence and bolts for Genoa. While he is there he takes pity on the girl and sends for her to come for a fortnight's holiday. He returns to Paris and then bolts again, this time to North Africa. There he visits his Moroccan mistress, a girl of about sixteen, and finds that she has contracted leprosy. Thoroughly scared, he forces himself to continue relations with her (a touch of super-sophisticated primitivism this!) until he finds a spot on his own arm and takes panic. He consults a skin specialist, but finds that the spot is only

<sup>1</sup> It is the prospective mother-in-law to whom he is speaking, of course!

<sup>2</sup> *The Lepers* (Routledge).

a fungus. During this time he has broken off from Solange, but at the end of the book he receives two letters, one from Solange, now married, and one from Andrée. Solange he rebukes, Andrée he arranges to meet in a *café*, but she muddles the arrangements and misses him. After this Costals never had any sign of life from either of them, so that it may be said that, from Montherlant's point of view, they lived happily ever after.

Although Costals has rejected all religion and all morality, it still seems to give him a perverted pleasure to view his actions and those of others from the angle of orthodox Christianity. Catholicism in particular fascinates him. He likes his mistresses to be Catholics ("Believing Catholics") so that he may know that in their thoughts they are damning their souls for him as well as giving their bodies. In his marital negotiations with the Dandillots, it gave him cynical pleasure to see them perjure their Catholic principles.

"... The mantelpiece now supported a Virgin. . . . And 'Sacred Hearts', 'Calvaries' and first communion certificates—for Jesus Christ was everywhere honoured in this home ready for registry marriage, divorce and abortion."<sup>1</sup>

But it is not enough to say that Costals delights in what in the eyes of others is evil. He does, somehow, seem to recognise the existence of evil, and to believe that it is an inevitable, necessary and even desirable part of life—a sort of materialist dualism:

"'Let me be what I am,' he exclaimed passionately. 'What was I saying? Ah, yes . . . lodes . . . well, sometimes these lodes run parallel. Sometimes they cross, and when they do they interlace in arabesques, and seem to twine playfully about each other, for you know how playful I am. And sometimes, too, it happens they melt one into the other, don't you see, with the worst and best welded as one and indistinguishable apart. And in the evil that I do, there's a part I love and a part I don't, just as in the good I do there's a part I love and a part that does not matter. (One of the cats sneezed.) Certainly, I get pleasure from the evil I do, but I think I get even more from the good.'"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Lepers.*

<sup>2</sup> *Pity for Women.*

With this rejection of every kind of ideal, Costals becomes entirely selfish, seeking no communion with others (except for sensual pleasure), regarding himself as an aristocrat of the intellect—or perhaps not even of the intellect, but an aristocrat of his self-hood. The connection between this attitude and that of some of the fascist leaders is obvious. It is interesting, too, to notice that another fascist tendency crops up in Costals, that of the subjection of women. Indeed, the chief impression left by these novels is that of fierce, bitter misogyny. Costals is cynical about women even in regard to the one thing for which he needs them:

“He had a notebook in which he entered the number of minutes his mistresses came late. And when the total reached five hours, he threw them over—at least he did in principle. All the same, he would give them due warning, three several times, when two, three, and four hours had accumulated.”<sup>1</sup>

This, of course, is deliberately Byronic, half-assumed. But throughout the novels runs a consistent contempt for the whole mental outlook of women. Scarcely anything they do or say does not evoke scorn from Costals. He is continuously analysing women's thoughts and attitudes:

“Well, the succession of small pleasures which, according to men, goes to constitute happiness, as the stars go to constitute the Milky Way, is no more capable of doing so in the eyes of women than, for the Christian, a thousand venial sins are capable of constituting a mortal sin.<sup>2</sup> For woman, happiness is a clearly defined state, provided with a personality and a particular, substantial reality, extremely alive, potent, sensitive. A woman will say to you that she is happy as she will say to you that she is warm or cold. ‘What are you thinking?’ ‘That I am happy.’ ‘Why do you want to do that?’ ‘To be happy, of course.’ (And with what vivacity of expression! A ‘by God’ is understood.) ‘I was afraid you might do such a thing.’ ‘Did you think I wanted to ruin my happiness?’ She will describe her happiness to you, saying, for instance, ‘When I am happy, I don’t talk,’ or, ‘I am always well when I’m happy!’ She will know exactly when it begins and

<sup>1</sup> *Pity for Women.*

<sup>2</sup> Note this comparison. Very characteristic of Costals' habits of thought.



when it ends. There is a book in the Bibliothèque Rose called 'Fourteen Days of Happiness.' It is a book written by a woman. But that is clear from the title. A man would never have had the idea that happiness could be cut into clean slices like a cake. And those 'fourteen days of happiness'—meaning any definitely limited period of happiness, any obviously ephemeral happiness—would be a matter for much more rejoicing to a woman than they would be to a man in her place."<sup>1</sup>

There is a good deal of very shrewd and witty observation here, of course, but behind it all is the assumption that what a woman does is contemptible, not in itself, but because a woman does it. This point of view is worked out more completely and with mock-scientific thoroughness at the end of *The Lepers*:

"The moral inferiority of woman, of which we have noted certain features, and which is matched by a considerable number of physiological inferiorities (in a medical book under my eyes, the bare enumeration of these inferiorities occupies ten lines), woman herself is conscious of. . . . How should she fail to admit the sorriness of her race, when she sees that she is always the asker, always she who *needs*, always she beating her wings, and squawking for her billfull? (Her need to be loved, kissed, enfolded, is a veritable disease. The shamefulness of this eternal supplication, confessed or not, this eternal mendicancy, at times camouflaged by coquetry's huge plumes.)"<sup>2</sup>

The misogyny is the result of the peculiar experiences and circumstances of Costals (or Montherlant). It is not, so far as I can see, an inevitable characteristic of a total belief in Natural Man, though it may be a likely one. But it is a useful example of the point of view which may develop when all belief in ideals, morality and transcendent values is thrown aside. *Pity for Women* and *The Lepers* are not pleasant reading, but they show the conception of Natural Man developed to its logical end in the life of a cultured man of modern European civilisation. It is now popular to regard Man as a purely natural creature (i.e. a creature living only in the world of Nature), a creature of impulses, appetites, instincts and nothing else. Many people hold this view of Man, often unconsciously, and often confused with the Pelagian conception of Man,

<sup>1</sup> *Pity for Women*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Lepers*.

It is important, therefore, that they should see their assumptions worked out to the logical conclusion. It is not a pretty conclusion. Henri de Montherlant knows that as well as anybody, but he has had the honesty to set it down with very considerable literary skill.

### *Aldous Huxley*

Of all those who followed Lawrence's lead in depicting Natural Man in his sexual aspects, Henri de Montherlant was the most thorough. But it was Aldous Huxley who was most directly influenced by Lawrence, and who shared with him a tendency towards puritanism. Huxley appeared in the '20's as a sort of disciple of Lawrence's, but since then his outlook has changed to such an extent that his later work ought really to be included in the third section of this book. But because his later development bears out to some extent the Manichæan tendencies in his earlier work and in Lawrence I propose to deal with it here.

I do not think Aldous Huxley is a writer of the same rank as Lawrence, Hemingway and Faulkner, but he is a man of great integrity, and has not been afraid to work out logically the implications of his own beliefs. His style is at its best, perhaps, in the long elaborate passages in which music, poetry, philosophy, etc., are commented on in mock scientific language—a device used also by Joyce in the catechism chapter of *Ulysses*, where a question about a scullery tap involves an answer which sketches the whole water system of Dublin.

This is Lord Edward musing:

"He read the words, idly first, then more carefully, then several times with a strained attention. 'The life of the animal is only a fragment of the total life of the universe.' Then what about suicide? A fragment of the universe would be destroying itself? No, not destroying; it couldn't destroy itself even if it tried. It would be changing its mode of existence. Changing. . . . Bits of animals and plants became human beings. What was one day a sheep's hind leg and leaves of spinach was the next part of the hand that wrote, the brain that conceived the slow movement of the Jupiter Symphony. And another day had come when thirty-six years of pleasures, pains, hungers, loves, thoughts, music,

together with infinite unrealised potentialities of melody and harmony had manured an unknown corner of a Viennese cemetery, to be transformed into grass and dandelions, which in their turn had been transformed into sheep, whose hind legs had in their turn been transformed into other musicians, whose bodies in their turn . . ."<sup>1</sup>

This trick of reducing the life of Natural Man to the level, not even of instincts or of lusts, but of biology, chemistry or physics is common in Huxley. In the passage quoted above it is done very well, yet the prose lacks a contemporary flavour. It reads rather like an elaborate writing-up of a paragraph by a brilliant journalist. And the rest of Huxley's work has too often the air of high-brow journalism. As a journalist swots up his facts in an encyclopædia and then writes an article on, say, growing turnips in window-boxes, Huxley studies "The Cloud of Unknowing" and produces the chapter on mysticism in *Grey Eminence*. There is the appearance of a display of erudition for its own sake.



Huxley's first novel, *Crome Yellow* (1921), was modelled obviously on the works of Thomas Love Peacock. It showed a mind witty, fastidious and satirical, yet capable of great enjoyment of life. It was welcomed at once by the young people of the 20's as the first work of a writer who would express Natural Man's zest in his faculties, and at the same time be most delightfully rude to those who held any other conception of the nature of Man.

In his next novel, *Antic Hay*, the same qualities were shown with greater skill. Theodore Gumbriel, B.A., the inventor of Gumbriel's Patent Smallclothes (an ingenious device to alleviate the discomfort of hard benches), who fits himself up with a false beard and a coat with padded shoulders, is a very amusing character. In his disguises Gumbriel becomes the Complete Man, and is immediately successful with women and with financiers—though the latter are the tougher proposition. Gumbriel, with his brayn and beard, picking up women on the streets, cowing capitalists by a thump of his fist, is sufficiently like a Lawrence character to be a symbol of Natural Man emancipated from the

<sup>1</sup> *Point Counter Point* (Chatto and Windus).

conventions of society. But it must not be forgotten that the beard was false. Huxley always wrote with a mocking tone. And this mocking tone, oddly enough, was quite welcome at the time. Huxley and de Montherlant and other writers who accepted the conception of Natural Man with little or no reservations, nevertheless seem continually to be measuring him by orthodox codes which they do not accept. It is as if Huxley said: "This is how Man behaves and I think it is natural that he should, for I don't accept any code of morality—but if I did, Gumbriel would cut a pretty poor figure, wouldn't he?"

In *Those Barren Leaves* the mocking tone is intensified and the satire becomes keener, until in *Point Counter Point* (1928), Huxley produced one of the most biting satires on the post-war generation. But the satire was still directed mainly against those who denied or impeded the impulses of Natural Man. The old rake who plans to marry a congenital idiot for her money is bilked on the eve of the wedding when his bride is poisoned by eating fish; it is a typical anticlimax. The characters in these books are nearly all unpleasant sensation-seekers, more vicious and less amusing than the characters of earlier novels. The creation of character was never one of Huxley's strong points, and he seems to have kept to a number of types (the bored, cultured woman of pleasure; the brainless chit pretending to be a lady of the world; the learned, bawdy, penniless middle-aged *roué*, etc.), and to have repeated them with variations, each variation usually less pleasant than the former. But in *Point Counter Point* one character comes to life in an unexpected way. He is Mark Rampion, a clear representation of Natural Man, and a recognisable portrait of Lawrence. At times Rampion's words are so like what we would have expected from Lawrence, that we wonder if Huxley was reporting an actual conversation, since he was a close friend of Lawrence:

"And then, think of that awful incapacity to call a spade a spade. He [Shelley] always had to pretend it was an angel's harp or a platonic imagination. Do you remember the 'Ode to the Skylark'? 'Hail to thee, blithe spirit! Bird thou never wert!' Rampion recited with a ludicrous parody of an elocutionist's 'expression.' 'Just pretending, just lying to himself as usual. The lark couldn't be allowed to be a mere bird, with blood and feathers and a nest and an appetite for caterpillars. Oh no! That

was much too coarse. It had to be a disembodied spirit. Bloodless, boneless. A kind of ethereal flying slug. . . . But I wish to God,' Rampion added, with a sudden burst of comically extravagant fury, 'I wish to God the bird had had as much sense as those sparrows in the book of Tobit and dropped a good large mess in his eye. It would have served him damned well right for saying it wasn't a bird. Blithe spirit, indeed! Blithe spirit.' ”<sup>1</sup>

In the character of Rampion, Natural Man may still be triumphant, but in the rest of the book there is a new questioning, not only about the fate of society, but about the motives of the individual. This no doubt was seen as a revolt against modern civilisation similar to Lawrence's revolt, but at the front of the book is a quotation of Fulke Greville which cannot be put aside so easily:

“Oh, wearisome condition of humanity,  
Born under one law, to another bound,  
Vainly begot and yet forbidden vanity,  
Created sick, commanded to be sound.  
What meaneth nature by these diverse laws,  
Passion and reason, self-division's cause?”

I do not see how these lines, with their distinctly Pauline flavour, can refer to anything but Original Sin.

Together with this gradual rejection of the doctrine of the perfection of man, whether in Wellsian or Lawrentian terms, was a growing Puritanism, a growing disgust with the physical. It had shown itself in such incidents as that of the tainted fish, and in many touches of unpleasantness scattered throughout the novels and poems:

“Two lovers quietly sweating palm to palm.”

Later it was to show itself more violently in *Eyeless in Gaza* in both the account of the girl's theft of a kidney from a butcher's shop and in the incident of the dog falling from an aeroplane and splattering sunbathers with its blood. So far, however, this had been limited, but both the disgust and the rejection of the doctrine of inevitable progress came out into the open in 1932 with *Brave*

<sup>1</sup> *Point Counter Point* (Chatto and Windus).

*New World*. From this point Huxley writes not of Natural Man, but of Imperfect Man, and the rest of his work ought strictly to be considered in the third section of this book.



*Brave New World* sets out to imagine and satirise a Wellsian Utopia, a task for which Huxley was very well fitted. To begin with, he had had a scientific education (according to tradition, Aldous was intended for a scientist and Julian for a writer!) and was able to provide his wildest fancies with a solemn "scientific" explanation in the Wellsian tradition. The opening chapter in the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre, in which human embryos are being incubated in bottles, is a fine piece of virtuosity in this manner. Huxley's prose style found here its best subject matter:

" . . . [The Director] continued with some account of the technique for preserving the excised ovary alive and actively developing; passed on to a consideration of optimum temperature, salinity, viscosity; referred to the liquor in which the detached and ripened eggs were kept; and, leading his charges to the work tables, actually showed them how this liquor was drawn off from the test-tubes; how it was let out drop by drop on to the specially warmed slides of microscopes; how the eggs which it contained were inspected for abnormalities, counted and transferred to a porous receptacle . . ." etc., etc.<sup>1</sup>

So far it is all very good fun, but the book does not remain fun for long. In what follows, planned with mock-scientific ingenuity and written with passionate satire, Huxley draws a picture of the world in which everything is ordered and conditioned, everything works to plan, but at the heart of it all is rottenness, sterility and death. All actions and all decisions are governed only by the expedient. Religion has become an emotional entertainment; love a casual distraction. The only God is that of efficiency, symbolised in the now mythical figure of Ford. (Here Huxley enjoys himself with some brilliant and blasphemous satire on the name of Our Ford, Ford's Day celebrations, etc.)

<sup>1</sup> *Brave New World* (Chatto and Windus).

So far this may seem directed entirely against the scientists, against those who held a Pelagian conception of Man, but later Huxley introduces the "Savage." The "Savage" is a person of the ways of thought of our own time. He lives in a "Reservation" where the civilisation of the early twentieth century is preserved as is that of the Red Indians to-day in certain reservations in the United States. The "Savage" is by no means a pretty picture. Certainly he insists on the human values and is the only really living thing in this glorified laboratory. But while Huxley emphasises that we must not throw away the human values and develop a hive-like order, yet he has no illusions as to the failings and frailties in the nature of Man. As he expressed it later:

"Such is the world in which we find ourselves—a world which, judged by the only criterion of progress [i.e. progress towards 'liberty, peace, justice and brotherly love'], is manifestly in regression. Technological advance is rapid. But without progress in charity, technological advance is useless. Indeed, it is worse than useless. Technological progress has merely provided us with more efficient means for going backward."<sup>1</sup>

In *After Many a Summer*, his last-published novel, Huxley returns to the manner of *Brave New World*. The main theme seems to be a deliberate reply to *Back to Methuselah*. A secretary is employed at a country house to edit the private correspondence and papers of the family. He discovers that one of the ancestors, who had lived during the eighteenth century, had made a study of longevity. There are actually large fishponds containing huge, aged carp which provided the necessary glands or something like that for experiments to prolong life. In the end the secretary discovers that the experiments have been successful and that the eighteenth-century ancestor and his wife are still alive, now between two and three hundred years old, and are kept hidden away because they have reverted practically to the state of apemen. Huxley gives ingenious "scientific" explanations of this reversal to a primitive state. I cannot follow these explanations, and I think they are just part of the game of scientific fantasy, but I feel that the novel may be regarded as an allegory which warns us that material progress will not in itself get rid of the brute in man's nature.

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means* (Chatto and Windus).

*After Many a Summer* is not so brilliant a piece of work as *Brave New World*, but it has one episode which reaches the same heights of fantastic satire. This is the super-luxury cemetery, the Garden of Love and Remembrance, where statues of Venus replace the marble angels and crosses. It is a wicked satire on the sentimentalising of Natural Man which we will find in some of the novels to be dealt with later.



Between *Brave New World* and *After Many a Summer*, Huxley produced one novel, *Eyeless in Gaza*. As the title suggests, with its reference to Samson "eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves," it is concerned with the problem of the freedom of the individual. As fiction it is not one of Huxley's best efforts—the characters are mostly those whom we have met before, and the incidents are so uniformly unpleasant that the book is monotonous. It is remarkable, however, for the use of a technical device by which the story is not told continuously; indeed, there are four or five stories, dealing each with a different period in the life of one man. These stories are broken up into chapters and scattered through the book, not chronologically, so that we may learn of the effects of an action before we know the cause. It is a device which has been used before, and more subtly and effectively, as in the work of William Faulkner, but rarely so deliberately. It tells of the efforts of Anthony Beamis to attain complete freedom for himself by escaping from all obligations of society, family, marriage, morals, honour or ordinary decency. He develops into a highly-cultured, callous voluptuary, not unlike the central character of the novels of de Montherlant. Gradually, however, he comes to realise that he is not achieving freedom at all; instead he is becoming a slave to his senses, his pleasures, and those things which are necessary for their gratification. He tries, therefore, like St. John of the Cross, "to divest himself of the love of created beings," and in his subsequent practice of "non-attachment" he becomes a pacifist.

The change of heart in Anthony Beamis was to be found also in his creator. Huxley associated himself for a time with the anti-war movement of the late Dick Sheppard, and published a widely-read pamphlet, *What are You going to do about It?*<sup>1</sup> He outlined his

<sup>1</sup> How unacceptable was Huxley's new way of thought to the politically-minded writers of the '30's can be seen in the title of Day Lewis' reply: *We are Not going to do Nothing*.



position in *Ends and Means* (1937) and made it clear that he had now become a sort of quietist, one to whom politics and the affairs of the world were quite literally the sphere of the Devil. While he rejects the idea of a personal God, he believes that human beings, by "awareness and detachment," can become conscious of being one with the divine. The mystics who achieve this union are the wells through which the water of life comes to men, but if they try to express their knowledge of the divine in practical action or politics they lose all their power or pervert it to evil ends. His position therefore is very similar to that of some Protestant theologians, with the difference, little to him and immense to them, that he does not accept any of the dogma of Christianity. It is a position summed up in the invocation, "Sit down, O men of God," and I am tempted to quote two stanzas of a mock-Barthian hymn which appeared in *The Student Movement*:

"One thing we know, one thing alone:  
This cheers our drooping heart:  
That nothing can of Thee be known  
Save that, perhaps, Thou art.

"Lord, give us grace that we may be  
Hopeless, but undismayed;  
That in Thy darkness we may see  
Darkness nor be afraid."

All this was dealt with again, with more particular reference to the meditations and practices of the individual, in *Grey Eminence* (1941), a biography of François Leclerc du Tremblay, Père Joseph of Paris, the right-hand man of Cardinal Richelieu (*l'Emminence rouge*). Père Joseph was a monk of the order of the Grey Friars, a very ascetic order which, among other things, forbade its members to travel any way but on foot, and barefoot at that. He was influenced by the English mystic, Father Benet of Canfield, and practised the art of meditation with very considerable success—if one may use such a word. He was a man of great and genuine piety, who rose every day at four and spent the first two hours in mental prayer. He founded a convent of Calvarian nuns whom he always visited once or twice a week when he was in France, however busy he may have been with affairs of state. Huxley opens his biography with a vivid imaginative account of the monk

tramping along the roads and going through his elaborate spiritual exercises. He follows with a short, encyclopædic chapter on the history of Christian mysticism, and then goes on to give an account of Père Joseph's political life. As the private representative of Cardinal Richelieu, Père Joseph was probably the most hated and most feared man in Europe in the first half of the seventeenth century. It is difficult to be sure how far rumour is true when it makes him responsible for the worst kind of murders, assassinations and tortures, but it is certain that he organised a vast European spy system and descended to every sort of deceit. Above all, he devoted his immense gifts and intellect to prolong the Thirty Years' War, one of the most fearful wars in history. At the beginning of the war, the population of Germany was about 21,000,000; at the end it was 13,000,000. The whole of central Europe was starving, and cannibalism was not uncommon. Huxley describes the conditions at the siege of La Rochelle, when all the cats and dogs were gone and even the supply of rats ran short, and the aged Duchess of Rohan ate mice on silver dishes, and drank a bouillon prepared from the harness in her stables.

This is the person whom Huxley puts before us and asks how we can reconcile the contradictions. For Père Joseph himself the explanation was simple. He was convinced that the Will of God could be achieved only through the rise of France, and the rise of France only through the power of Richelieu. And if to serve Richelieu meant to do the dirtiest possible tricks in politics, then to do those tricks in those circumstances was the Will of God. Pride in personal success, vain-glory and power were put aside by "annihilating" them, by offering them up to God. But Huxley does not believe that Père Joseph, the mystic, would have accepted such reasoning had not his integrity been perverted in some way. He had touched pitch and was defiled. For Huxley, politics are the pitch. The mystic, however arduous his exercises, however great his union with the divine, however real his inspiration, will be perverted from the way of God if he meddles with politics and the affairs of the world.



This then is the point at which Huxley had arrived; one which desires complete non-attachment from the created world, like a

Christian or half-Christian mystic who has abandoned Christian dogma, or perhaps more like a Buddhist. It is not surprising that his youthful preoccupation with the senses should turn later to disgust and finally to a wish to escape entirely from the physical world. This position, indeed, is a logical development of those Manichæan implications which were always present in his thought, and which were also to be found in one aspect of the thought of D. H. Lawrence.

It is notable that Middleton Murry, another man who was closely associated with Lawrence, has become a pacifist. But Murry's position seems to me very different from that of Huxley—the two were always at variance each with the other, as can be seen from Huxley's cruel caricature of Murry in *Point Counter Point*. Whereas Huxley's pacifism comes from non-attachment, Murry's seems to come from his being so attached to created beings, or at any rate, to his fellow humans, that he is physically incapable of associating with anything which will cause pain or suffering to any of them, whatever may be the long-distance motives. Murry has in him something of the compassion which made Lawrence go through agonies during the Four Years' War.

*Richard Aldington, Charles Morgan, etc.*

I want to show now that the "doctrine" of Natural Man has become widely accepted by people to-day, and is to be found in most popular middlebrow literature. But usually in a very limited form. Man is regarded as a creature following his natural instincts and desires only in sex and personal relationships. In other ways he follows the ordinary conventions and morality of the society of which he is a member. The reason is simple. The middlebrow novelist depends for his sale on subscription lending libraries, which draw their clients largely from the suburban classes, especially from married women. While it is obvious that the real Natural Man will have no scruples about lying, thieving or killing, such attributes do not commend themselves even to the daydreams of the suburban housewife. Living in comfortable circumstances and surroundings, she does not sympathise with anarchist or anti-social tendencies. Among the classes whose way of life is not so secure there is less compunction, and we find that

detective stories are superseded by gangster stories. There is even a new (and, pray God, transient) fashion, particularly among men of the Forces, for a nasty mixture of sadism, eroticism and gangsterdom.

With the 2d. library public, however, Natural Man is seen largely as one to whom love has no codes but the satisfaction of desire. Of course, it can't be put as plainly as that. It has to be mushed up with sentimentalism. And so evolves the romantic daydream, expressed over and over again in phrases such as this: "It can't be wrong if we love one another"; or: "God hasn't given us love like ours to make us unhappy."

This attitude is not true even to the assumptions behind it. Lawrence and Montherlant, each in his own way, followed through as far as he could to the logical end of his beliefs. But this suburban fiction is really fantasy, based on an attitude which by any standards (Christian, Liberal, or those of Natural Man) is false. Very frequently we are presented with a pair of lovers, cultured, "sensitive," artistic.

"The hero is an artist or a poet of genius, or at least of an artistic temperament, and the heroine a sensitive flower in silver and grey. And they quote metaphysical poets and mystics to one another, and by their tenderness comfort each other for the hard cruelty of the philistines. In this kind they may triumph in the end, or they may prefer to die. But they are still figures of romance, because the selfishness and sordidness are all on the other side. There is no suggestion that they too are sinners, and that the moralists have a serious point of view which deserves at least some of our sympathy. On the contrary the moralists are either gagged or made to relent. And yet the story is not treated as if it were pure fantasy. The lovers and moralists are made as if they were at least intended to be convincing portraits of people in the real world."<sup>1</sup>

I do not for one moment mean to condemn fantasy as such, not even the fantasy of pure escape. The fairy story, the story of knights in armour, and the desert island story have in the past been a source of delight to most people, including those who couldn't read. In their archaic forms these are enjoyed now only by boys

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from an article on "Some Versions of Romance," by Bro. George Every, S.S.M., in *Waterloo Bridge*, the broadsheet of St. John's-in-the-Crypt, S.E.1.

and scholars. But the modern equivalents are available for all: the detective novel, the Wild Western, the scientific romance. In the films, these are presented with vivid pictorial illusion, and with "live actors" to play the parts. The films, too, have developed a composite form, nearer in spirit to the old fairy tales and desert island stories, in which South Sea islands provide the exotic setting, film star flats provide the palaces, and anything from aeroplanes to hurricanes provide the marvels. For the majority of people, even perhaps the great majority, this is the best sort of imaginative entertainment. It is not only invigorating, it is often, in the long run, not really "escape" at all for, as in *Robinson Crusoe*, it presents the problems of everyday life, simplified and placed in a strange setting. But the type of fantasy which is found in the middlebrow best sellers is different. The settings, the externals, the "adventures" are those of an everyday world: it is the values which are fantastic. Moreover, these books do not admit to being fantastic. And that is where the danger lies.



Of the many popular authors who purvey this sort of fiction, I will mention only two: Richard Aldington and Charles Morgan. Both of them are skilled novelists; both poets and men of wide reading. Both, in fact, use a good deal of conscious artistry to give an effect of high literary "tone." Quotations from the poets most fashionable in advanced circles are displayed like "arty" pictures to impress the visitors. Aldington came forward in the direct line of descent from Lawrence. In *All Men are Enemies* he tells a story of the aftermath of the War, in which he seeks in particular to emphasise and romanticise the sense of touch. In later novels he has become more cynical. To a certain extent he may be satirising those people and institutions who frustrate Natural Man in the fulfilment of his desires. But I think the cynicism is due more to realisation, perhaps not fully conscious, of what the acceptance of Natural Man really would lead to. Those who had started by seeing Natural Man as Lawrence had seen him were beginning to see him as Montherlant sees him. This, I think, is the cause, or part cause of a good deal of the pessimism and cynicism of the '20's. (Another cause, of course, was the disappointment of hopes for a better social order which had been raised during the War and

immediately before it. In the minds of many people during the '20's there was therefore a sudden loss of faith in both Natural Man and Liberal Man.) The fuller results of this we shall study in the third section of this book. At present we are concerned with those who did not reject the conception of Natural Man, though they may have become cynical as to his future. Such, for instance, was Noel Coward. And though *The Waste Land* was not intended by its author to express "the disillusion of our age," it certainly seemed to do so for many readers and critics. Lastly, I might mention Eric Linklater, whose earlier novels (*Poet's Pub*, *Juan in America*) portrayed Natural Man with a humour midway between that of Aldous Huxley and that of Wodehouse, and with a gusto shared by neither.



Charles Morgan has a very high reputation based on a few novels written with great care and artifice. His prose is in the tradition of Meredith's, full, involved and ornamented. In passages of visual description he undoubtedly draws his pictures with detail:

"Crowning the landscape was the wooded ridge which marked the main road from Cognac to Angoulême, now puffy with new foliage and the late gold of the sun. A barge was being towed down-river, dragging behind her a double wake that shone like the track of a small snail."<sup>1</sup>

This is old-fashioned certainly ("Crowning the landscape"), and it lacks the vividness which brings it before the eye, but the barge and its wake have been seen truly and noted. When he begins to "write up" a scene, however, his prose becomes vague and woolly, lacking the imaginative power to make it live, for all the carefully-composed sentences:

"He lifted up his head and gazed long into her face, silently and with growing comprehension of the change in her, in himself, in the destiny and significance of their love for each other. How radiant her face was! How lighted with tenderness and acceptance

<sup>1</sup> *The Voyage* (Macmillan).

and awe! The fear and hunger, the wild, troubled fierceness that he had once seen in it, were vanished. Desire remained without the terror and anger of desire. Delight shone there, but with a clear tranquil brilliance."<sup>1</sup>

Charles Morgan's content matches his style. The story of his most famous novel, *The Fountain*, is simple enough in its outline. It tells of an English officer, interned during the Four Years' War, who is billeted on parole at a lonely castle. There he falls in love with the wife of the owner of the castle, and eventually takes her for his mistress. In the end, her husband dies, forgiving both of them. It is a story which might have served those who accepted the Christian morality—Richardson would have been shocked and sententious, Fielding ironic, Wycherley very witty. And those, like Lawrence or Montherlant, who accept no code of morality, also might have used it. It is certainly unexceptional in itself. But Morgan, who does not follow Lawrence to his cult of blood-and-soil and of the primitive, nevertheless finds it necessary to invent a romantic pseudo-mystical attitude to love. Julie is waiting for her lover to come. (Remember, here, the story of the country clergyman who, after reading *The Fountain*, said: "In my young days they called it adultery and had done with it."):

"She drew the curtains apart, but there was no moon, no glint on the waters nor rift on the heavy sky. When she opened a pane and would have leaned out, January drove her back, but after the window was closed again, the curl and hiss of the waterfall persisted in her hearing, or in her imagination, and a thin, lipping breeze flicked at the outer stones like the run of a lizard. Come soon, she said, pressing her clasped hands upon her knees. Let him come soon, she repeated, laying her fingers on her hot cheeks and rising from her place as though to welcome him. The future may take care of itself—and with a gesture of her hand she thought that she put it from her. Grant that I may not be mean and fearful; give me a single mind for this love that will not come again. Encircle it. Guard it. Enclose me in it. And covering her face, she supposed that she was enclosed from the world. But I am praying, she thought, and, surprised that she had been praying, sank down on her knees, there being for her an ancient comfort

<sup>1</sup> *The Fountain* (Macmillan).

of familiarity in the attitude of prayer. But criticism of herself had driven prayer from her mind, and she could say only, without thoughts of their relevance, words taught to her long ago, which by their rhythm and association, not by their meaning, so commanded her, that, when they had been silently spoken and repeated, she remained upon her knees, hearing the waterfall and the low wind as though they were of a world that she would never revisit."

In *Sparkenbroke* we are presented with a sort of sham Byronic figure, and in *The Voyage* Morgan begins to tamper with a rather Huxleyan quietism, but with nothing of Huxley's intellectual approach. The story is set in the vine-growing districts of the valley of the Charente; a setting which suits the quiet intricacies of Morgan's prose. Barbet, the owner of a vineyard, is also the warden of the local prison. He falls in love with a woman born near his home, who now lives a life of pleasure in Paris. Through his love for the woman, Thérèse, and through his meditations, Barbet reaches such a point of "non-attachment" that he lets the prisoners free, and ends by floating down-river in a boat with Thérèse. The voyage down-river symbolises the acceptance of Destiny, Fate, the Will of God, or whatever Morgan likes to call it. But the purposeless drift demonstrates the danger of vague mysticism without the guidance of any dogma or philosophy.



While dealing with "escape" literature, it is convenient to mention the historical novel. In my opinion, the historical novel is the best form of "escape" in literature. To the critic, or to anyone who has to spend much time reading modern literature, it is very refreshing to dip into *Guy Mannering* or *Rookwood*. The popular historical novels of the present day, *Gone with the Wind* and the Herries books and the like, are very different from Scott and Ainsworth, and many readers find the latter dull. To a certain extent this is just because of the inevitable change in literary fashions, so that the average reader feels self-conscious in the face of Scott's style—and it is at times deplorable. But the main difference is more important than this. It is that Walpole and the author of *Gone with the Wind* have drawn their characters in an



historical setting, but in the modern moral scheme of Natural Man. Hence the suburban housewife is able both to get the romantic glamour of olden times, and at the same time to sympathise with characters who think as she has been taught to think by Aldington and Morgan. *Gone with the Wind* and such works are not historical novels at all, but modern middlebrow stories decked up in fancy dress.



We have seen that the cult of the primitive and the cult of the irrational are both closely allied to the doctrine of Natural Man, though they are not necessarily dependent on it. Primitivism can be seen in many different aspects of modern art. The revival of interest in primitive art made many people aware for the first time of beauty where before they had seen only uncouth carvings or designs. It had its obvious results in the work of sculptors like Epstein and painters like Picasso, and helped artists to break away from the picture-postcard tradition of nineteenth-century art without retiring entirely into surrealism. Perhaps even the development of a neo-Byzantine style by Eric Gill and many artists who followed him may be regarded as a sort of return to the primitive within the Christian tradition.

In music the same tendency can be seen in the barbaric rhythms of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," and perhaps more significantly in jazz. Jazz has its sophisticated fans, who trace its development from the music of American Negroes, and who admire the work of Duke Ellington and others. For the majority, however, jazz has been watered down to dance music. In this form it has an enormous public appeal to the young who dance to it, and the old who knit to it, and to people of almost every nationality and race, except, possibly, the Eastern races. There must be some very real reason why the errand boys of Moscow and the society ladies of Buenos Ayres express themselves in the same distortion of normal rhythm. The cult of the primitive, therefore, appeals to the illiterate as well as the cultured, but only when it has been disguised so that it is not recognised as such by the reader or listener. Perhaps the only example of a great popular success for the undisguised primitive is in the Tarzan stories, and even then the man of the apes has aristocratic ancestors!

The cult of the irrational, or at any rate the reaction against scientific rationalism, is more widespread than primitivism in modern art. It can be seen, not only in its obvious surrealist forms, but in the fantasies of Kafka, the quiet, symbolist novels of Virginia Woolf, and in practically the whole of modern poetry. To the cultured reader it is so much the part of the stock-in-trade of the modern writer that he is scarcely aware of it as he reads. To the average man, however, it is still anathema. He complains that he can't understand modern poetry, and that in modern painting he can't recognise the objects represented. It is interesting (and, I think, significant) to notice that while he objects to the irrational in work which he considers literature or art, he absorbs it quite happily when his self-consciousness is not aroused. This has been realised by several advertising companies, with the result that suburban travellers accept more advanced styles of art in Tubes than they do in art galleries—the firm of Shell, for instance, has issued excellent posters which are pure surrealism. Cubism, or developments of it, can be found on recruiting posters. This is even more noticeable in the art of abstract design, which may be regarded as one of the many aspects of the cult of the irrational. People who will laugh their heads off at a picture by Ben Nicholson, or a piece of abstract sculpture by Henry Moore or Barbara Hepworth, are nevertheless quite cheerful among abstract art at home. In the furniture of all classes, abstract patterns have replaced the naturalistic in carpets, linoleum and wallpaper. Geometric designs, usually of a jazz or "futuristic" type, are to be found in curtains, cushion-covers and upholstery. Jazz shapes have even taken a hold on ornaments, like those on handbags and in ladies' hats.

In popular entertainment, too, the irrational shows itself in the films of the Marx Brothers, in Crazy Gang shows and, more recently, in ITMA broadcasts. No doubt much of Tommy Handley's very wide appeal is due to outrageous punning, stock phrases ("Don't forget the diver") and his own exuberant vitality, but much of the fun comes from the almost-surrealist set of inane characters. Yet another case is a comic column in the popular newspaper. It is curious that these are often written by men of education and even of scholarship, and passages which are intended to appear as pure nonsense to the average reader of the paper are full of reference and allusions which may be recognised

by the erudite. It is rather as if "The Waste Land" had made its first appearance in *Punch*!

With all this in mind I feel justified in saying that the "doctrine" of Natural Man, with its accompanying cults of the primitive and the irrational, is to be found not just among the sophisticated. Indeed, in a confused and incomplete way, it has established itself in the popular thought of the modern age.

## *Hemingway*

IN those writers whom we have considered so far Natural Man was seen only in one aspect of his life, in his sexual and personal relationships. The attempt to portray him as a fighting, hunting, hungering animal, as well as just a sexual one had to be made eventually, and it was made in America, notably by Ernest Hemingway. For Hemingway, the mysticism of Lawrence, the culture of Montherlant, were unessential. He wanted to show Man stripped of everything but his purely natural attributes—and for him this meant his purely animal attributes. It was to be expected therefore that his characters should rarely be people of intelligence, and that they should live their lives scarcely at all on an intellectual plane. It was to be expected that he should be tough, and should write of love and war and bull-fights. But to do all this he had to find a new style. Hemingway is one of the most accomplished technicians in modern fiction, and he knew that the emotionally overcharged prose of Lawrence would not do for his purpose. He needed a prose which would be stripped to essentials; which would present a clear visual picture or describe an action without any trimmings from the writer. Above all, he needed a prose which would present thought in its simplest terms, and a language which would not bring with it the overtones and associations of culture and literature. And luckily an American living in Paris had been making experiments in exactly the sort of prose that he needed.

### *Gertrude Stein*

The chief importance of Gertrude Stein is that she helped to fashion a prose style which seemed nearer than anything then devised to the thought-processes of the simple mind. There are times in the work of Hemingway, Faulkner and others when this style seems to become a sort of folk prose, expressing confused and slow-moving thought with a queer grammar and rhythm of its own. But at first Miss Stein's experiments seemed to have a

very different aim. She wanted to "decarbonise" words of their conventional associations, to put them into new relationship each with others, and to build them up in rhythmical phrases and groups of phrases rather than logical statements, but in her later books she began to put together again the words she had been taking to pieces. And the result, oddly enough, was a prose which did not sound advanced or highbrow, but which gave the impression of the talk of a garrulous old woman. I do not know whether Miss Stein's more enthusiastic admirers would agree to this estimate of her work. Perhaps they claim that her later prose has great and hidden significance. Miss Stein herself rather encouraged them. She had no doubt that she was a genius and said so:

"What is a genius. Picasso and I used to talk about that a lot. Really inside you if you are a genius there is nothing inside you that makes you really different to yourself inside you than those are to themselves inside them who are not a genius, that is so.

"And so what is it that makes you a genius. Well yes what is it.

"It is funny that no matter what happens, how many more or how many less can read and write can write and read can talk and listen can move around in every kind of way the number that is the lack of geniuses always remains about the same, there are very few of them. No matter what happens there are very few of them generally speaking only one and sometimes and very often not even one.

"It is puzzling.

"What is a genius. If you are one how do you know you are one. It is not a conviction lots of people are convinced they are one sometimes in the course of their living but they are not one and what is the difference between being not one and being one. There is of course a difference but what is it."

The personality which shows through this is a very likeable one. Whatever we may have thought about Miss Stein as an experimentalist, we feel at home with this intelligent, rather bewildered, amusing old woman, and accept her belief in her own genius as one of her eccentricities, certainly not as pride.

The chief importance of Miss Stein's work is, of course, its effect on others. But for its own sake I think her greatest achievement is the creation of a new type of comic prose, especially in

the anecdote. The following paragraph from *Everybody's Autobiography* will serve as an example of her prose in the style which was most to influence the younger American writers. It tells of part of a search for servants, and is, to my mind, very funny indeed:

"So Georges Maratier put an advertisement in the paper and saw a great many couples who were not worth anything and finally he said he had found an excellent one and was sending them. He did not tell us they had a child with them, however they had and it was quite a pretty one and she went up the stairs and down again very prettily indeed but that was not surprising as her mother was a Portuguese and had been and still was a very pretty woman. The husband was an Alsatian and like many Alsations he felt he could do everything even if he had never done anything and he mostly had not. Also as do most Alsations he admired writing and he said to me, Madame I have a great deal of pleasure in telling you that my wife and myself and my daughter are going to dedicate our lives to you as long as you are living, all that I ask of you is that if anything happens to me you will undertake their care for their future life. Yes, yes I said, and that pleased him. Soon we found that she cooked beautifully but she only had one kidney and if you only have one kidney and you cook beautifully and have a husband who does nothing it is very trying. And it was, and she could not sleep and so the Alsatian thought they would all sleep under the trees. You can not very well do that in the mountains particularly if you have one kidney missing, it is cold and there is dew under the trees and beside country people do not like to see it, not here. All this excited the Alsatian."<sup>1</sup>

### *Hemingway*

When Hemingway started to write, he saw at once that Gertrude Stein had evolved a prose which was admirable for his purpose, that of describing Natural Man purely in terms of his animal attributes. Of course, he had to put a new life into it. Miss Stein's prose was too static as he found it. She was, as one critic has said, "the dummy keyboard" on which Hemingway practised his scales.

He needed, too, a prose which would give full play for his visual

<sup>1</sup> *Everybody's Autobiography* (Heinemann).

sense. Miss Stein, despite her interest in pictures, rarely described the outward appearance of things. Hemingway, on the other hand, is a fine descriptive writer. This does not mean that he uses masses of words to describe detail or to evoke the required response. Adjectives, similes, ornaments of any sort, are pared to the bone. He presents the image directly, allowing no words to come between it and the reader.

The same spare language can be used to describe violent action, and to present it almost as it might happen to an animal, with little concern for motive, and next to no reflection or comment:

"It wasn't about anything, something about making punch, and then we started fighting and I slipped and he had me down kneeling on my chest and choking me with both hands like he was trying to kill me and all the time I was trying to get the knife out of my pocket to cut him loose. Everybody was too drunk to pull him off me. He was choking me and hammering my head on the floor and I got the knife out and opened it up; and I cut the muscle right across his arm and he let go of me. He couldn't have held on if he wanted to. Then he rolled and hung on to that arm and started to cry and I said: 'What the hell you want to choke me for?' I'd have killed him. I couldn't swallow for a week. He hurt my throat bad."<sup>1</sup>

That is the beginning of one of the earlier stories of Hemingway, and since then this tough style has been imitated by many writers. But none of the imitators caught the personal tone in Hemingway's words, the tone of compassion which is always there behind all the toughness. Nor could any of them approach the superb technique with which he handles dialogue. He leaves out all explanatory phrases ("Said he sarcastically,") and lets arrangement convey the mood of the speaker and the intonation of his voice. The skill with which this is done is often miraculous:

"'I feel fine,' she said. 'There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine.'"

And even when this is taken from its context it is clear that the girl is feeling awful. How do we know? I leave a psychologist to

<sup>1</sup> "After the Storm," from *Winner Take Nothing* (Cape).

explain, but I suspect it is because of the otherwise unnecessary denial that there was anything wrong.

In this way, Hemingway makes his dialogue out of the barest bones of conversation. He often uses only the most trite language and phrases, the commonplace jargon of lovers, yet by repeating them, and varying them, he builds them into a pattern which is as moving as love poetry.

These are all technical considerations but they are necessary to show how Hemingway presented his picture of Natural Man stripped of all spiritual and nearly all intellectual attributes. His method probably reaches its best in his short stories. These usually describe some short and violent action—a murder, for instance. The characters have hardly any feelings which are not purely animal; they feel no remorse, nor love, nor even envy. They have no human emotions. They live entirely in a world of sensation—greed, or lust to kill or rape. Even the fear they feel is not the imaginative fear of the ordinary man, but the sharp, sudden fear of an animal that is cornered, a fear that arouses a desperate effort to fight free. The men themselves are usually strong and virile, living entirely on the plane of sensation. They are gangsters, smugglers, bull-fighters, boxers, soldiers, bandits, and sometimes men of culture, but they are never articulate, and scarcely even able to think. Some critics have made the mistake of confusing Hemingway with his characters, and of regarding him as the literary illiterate, the “Dumb Ox.” Certainly his characters, particularly those in his novels, have a habit of sharing his own experiences. Hemingway was an American exile in post-war Paris—so was Jake;<sup>1</sup> Hemingway was in the Italian Alps in the last War—so was Frederick Henry;<sup>2</sup> Hemingway fought in the Spanish War—so did Robert Jordan.<sup>3</sup> But Hemingway is not to be identified with any of them. Not only is he a man of great literary skill, he is also a man of deep emotions, at times sentimental even. Always he has sympathy for the beings he describes. And they need sympathy—for all Hemingway’s characters are doomed to failure in their attempts to fulfil their desires. The killer kills in vain, the thief loses his booty, the lover dies. In the short story, “After the Storm,” the opening paragraph of which has already been quoted, the man finds a liner which has been wrecked off the coast. He dives down and looks through the glass

<sup>1</sup> *Fiesta.*

<sup>2</sup> *A Farewell to Arms.*

<sup>3</sup> *For Whom the Bell Tolls.*



of the portholes and realises that the ship must have a fortune inside her. He has no thought of sorrow for those drowned, no sensation but the hope of riches. He struggles hard to get into the ship:

"I went down once more and I cracked the glass, only cracked it, and when I came up my nose was bleeding and I stood on the bow of the liner with my bare feet on the letters of her name and my head just out and rested there and then I swam over to the skiff and pulled up into it and sat there waiting for my head to stop aching and looking down into the water glass, but I bled, so I had to wash out the water glass. Then I lay back in the skiff and held my hand under my nose to stop it and I lay there with my head back looking up and there was a million birds above and all around."

The intense effort is there, and the immediate sensation and nothing more. He waits till the next day, but a storm comes and he cannot get out to the wreck. Then he is arrested for the knife attack described in the first paragraph. By the time he is released some Greeks have found the ship, blown in its side with dynamite and stripped it.

"I found her," says the man, "and I never got a nickel out of her. . . . Well, the Greeks got it all. Everything. They must have come fast all right. They picked her clean. First there was the birds, then me, then the Greeks, and even the birds got more out of her than I did."

That is typical of a Hemingway story. His *Natural Man* is always frustrated, sometimes by circumstances, sometimes by society. On the whole, the tone is ironic and anti-social. The more his *Natural Man* is frustrated, the more he is nagged and goaded to find satisfaction for his desires, and with further frustration he becomes bitter or hating, or tries to escape into sex or drink.

In his novels he writes of the same theme, but in more complicated terms. In three of them<sup>1</sup> he deals with *Natural Man*, fighting and lusting. Each is about love and war, which to Hemingway are the two main concerns of *Natural Man*. And they are incompatible. That is the tragedy.

<sup>1</sup> The exception is *To Have and Have Not*, which is more like an extended short story and is his least satisfactory work.

*Fiesta*<sup>1</sup> tells of a group of expatriate English and Americans in Paris after the Four Years' War. They are a dissolute, aimless, quarrelling crowd. Their only occupations are drink and sex, and when these bore them they go off to Spain to seek sensation in bull-fighting. Running through it all is the ironic love story of Lady Brett, who is practically a nymphomaniac, and Jake, an American, who as a result of a war-wound is sexually impotent. The irony and the style are as clean and sharp as a surgical knife. It has a purity which was not reached in the later novels with more "important" themes. The slang ("fine," "grand," "swell") is repeated in pattern till it seems to have almost the significance of liturgical responses. Yet the effect left on the reader is that it is all very pointless; but the point is in the pointlessness.

In his next novel, Hemingway presents the same theme of love and war; this time with less irony—indeed the irony was so concealed that the book became a best-seller among people who do not usually ask for irony in their library pudding. Frederick Henry is a member of the American Expeditionary Force, fighting in northern Italy in 1918. He meets an English nurse, Catherine Barkley. He is wounded, is nursed by Catherine, and they fall in love. Finally, when Catherine is going to have a child, they escape into Switzerland together, and there Catherine dies in childbirth. The story is told by Frederick Henry, to whom it is all the more painful because it is so incomprehensible. He indeed is an innocent who is badgered about by circumstance and who is frustrated in all his desires. He, like so many of Hemingway's characters, is one "that things are done to."



*For Whom the Bell Tolls* tells the same story, but the setting is now the Spanish Civil War. Again there is a love-affair, and again it is frustrated, this time by the death of the man. But it is a voluntary death; one which he might have escaped, but to which he submitted as his duty as a soldier. And this shows a change in Hemingway's attitude.

It is obvious that in the end not many people can be satisfied with the conception of Man as a purely natural being, existing only for the fulfilment of his own desires. Inevitably a time comes

<sup>1</sup> Published in America under the title, *The Sun also Rises*.

when life on this plane seems pointless, as it does in *Fiesta* and *A Farewell to Arms*. It is not encouraging to see yourself only as a continually frustrated Natural Man. Then, for most people, it becomes necessary to seek either some aim beyond themselves or some other interpretation of life. If they do not turn to another conception of the nature of Man, they try to find a satisfactory aim within the "doctrine" of Natural Man. This, of course, is illogical, as Henri de Montherlant knew. Once you have accepted the conception of Man as a purely natural being, whose actions have no relation to any transcendent values, you throw away all virtues, courage, all idea of good and bad, right and wrong, in personal life and in society. But few could face up to so great a denial. Some, like Lawrence, turned to a blood-and-soil mystic. Others, the majority, turned to politics. Even in Lawrence there was a tendency to political activity, a sort of fascism. Hemingway, too, turned to politics, and, naturally enough, to totalitarian politics, but in his case to communism.

The chief character of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is Robert Jordan, an American fighting on the Republican side in the Spanish War. He is an engineer of sorts and he has been sent to join a small band of guerrilla soldiers who are fighting behind Franco's lines. His job is to blow up a bridge when he receives a signal. At the beginning the interest is focused on the bridge:

" 'Is that the mill?' he asked.

" 'Yes.'

" 'I do not remember it.'

" 'It was built since you were here. The old mill is further down; much below the pass.'

"He spread the photostated military map out on the forest floor and looked at it carefully. The old man looked over his shoulder. He was a short and solid old man in a black peasant's smock and grey iron-stiff trousers and he wore rope-soled shoes. He was breathing heavily from the climb and his hand rested on one of the two heavy packs they had been carrying.

" 'Then you cannot see the bridge from here?'

" 'No,' the old man said. 'This is the easy country of the pass where the stream flows gently. Below, where the road turns out of sight in the trees, it drops suddenly and there is a steep gorge—'

" 'I remember.'

" 'Across this gorge is the bridge.'

" 'And where are their posts?'

" 'There is a post at the mill that you see there.' ”<sup>1</sup>

Then comes a time of waiting, preparation and spying out of the land. Jordan meets the other members of the little band. There is Pablo, the leader, a shifty unreliable man, who has tortured the fascists when he got the chance, and who is likely to desert at any time. There is Pilar, his wife, a foul-mouthed, masculine, astonishing character, who has more imagination than any of the men to see the dangers before them, and more courage to face them. She is looking after the only other woman of the party, Maria, a girl they had rescued from the fascists, who had violated her and shaved her head. Maria and Jordan fall in love. Their love is quite hopeless and with no future. They seize on it, violently and desperately, calling it "*La Gloire*," and believing that they had been given a mystical experience and at the time of consummation "the earth moved." But for all this their love is purely a matter of sensation. Apart from their few nights together in a sleeping-bag in the snow (an accommodation so frequently described that it becomes slightly comic) they might never have met. Their relationship has nothing subtle about it, nothing personal. Even Maria seems to have very little character. Apart from the physical characteristics of which Jordan takes particular notice, we know next to nothing about her. She is little more than a necessary foil for the male, the virile Natural Man.

For Robert Jordan is still the same character whom we have met before in Hemingway. Fighting and lusting are his life. Now in his politics he has an aim which transcends his appetites, but that aim is seen entirely in terms of them, an aim to build a social order where they will no longer be frustrated.

So from motives which are in themselves selfish he is able to make a choice which denies the self. Something goes wrong with the signal he was to receive. It is delayed too long, and too much enemy material gets across the bridge. Jordan plans his job. He and another shall approach the bridge, shoot the sentry, and get to work setting the charge. The others shall blockade the road. They carry out the orders. The bridge is destroyed, but when the band is trying to get away it has to cross a patch of hillside covered

<sup>1</sup> *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Cape).

by enemy fire, and Jordan's horse is killed under him. His thigh is broken. He forces the others to take Maria with them, but will not let them try to take him. At the end of the book he is lying beside a tree, a sub-machine gun in his hand, waiting for the enemy. Politics gives purpose, not only to Jordan's life, but to the story. This, together with the size of the book, has blinded people to the fact that technically it is not nearly so pure and controlled as the two earlier books. There are still many fine passages of description, but the language is thicker, with more epithets and similes. The action scenes are still superb, but the conversation is not so slick and the love affair is at times cloying. To suggest the formal style of Spanish speech, Hemingway has used a sort of Quaker English of "thees" and "thous." For the same reason, he has resorted to the Victorian device of expurgating the swear-words. This results in phrases like: "What are you doing now, you lazy drunken obscene unsayable son of an unnameable unmarried gypsy obscenity?", which have a novelty that is amusing, but scarcely legitimate.

It seems to me that this blunting of technique is due largely to the blunting of the perception behind it. While Hemingway was drawing a picture of Natural Man pure and simple, his technique was brilliant. But when he tried to bolster up the same Natural Man with political aims which could only be justified by transcendent values not allowed for in the "doctrine" of Natural Man, his philosophy becomes confused and his technique also. But an artist is not necessarily a philosopher. We cannot expect him always to be consistent. We can, however, expect him always to be honest, and this Hemingway has been. The change which took place in his thought between *Fiesta* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is the change which has taken place in the thought of a generation. It is illuminating to see it expressed so sensitively in the work of a writer of genius.

## *William Faulkner*

THE "doctrine" of Natural Man is a simplification of Man's nature. But few have the perception or the courage to accept this simplification in its purest form. Montherlant and the early Hemingway do, but most people allow illogical complications to blur their first conception, while still at the bottom they regard Man as a creature living purely on the plane of natural desires and impulses. Such a person is William Faulkner. He stands in something of the same relationship to Hemingway as that in which Lawrence stood to Montherlant. Like Hemingway, he is concerned with Man as a fighting, killing animal, as well as a sexual one. Like Hemingway, he writes stories of violence, and his style is a development of Gertrude Stein's. But, like Lawrence, he is never satisfied to present Man purely as a creature of impulses. There is something of the Puritan in his nature, something of the romantic, and something of the dualist. His psychological make-up is, if anything, more complicated than that of Lawrence, and his style and technique are often confused and difficult. No modern novelist of the first rank demands more hard work from the reader before he can be understood. The difficulties are not those of obscurity of reference or symbol, such as we may find in modern poetry; they are caused rather by certain technical tricks which the reader eventually gets used to from book to book. There is that of describing only the outward appearance of an incident and leaving the reader largely in the dark as to what is happening. There is that of calling a character by several names or calling two characters by the same name. There is that of dropping one story and of starting another which has no obvious connection with the first. The first story may be broken off in the middle of a paragraph or even of a sentence, and the second taken up just as suddenly. You labour on for page after page, wondering what it is all about and who is speaking, and where or when it all took place—for Faulkner thinks nothing of jumping backward or forward a hundred years without even mentioning it. But when the light does break through and you

begin to understand, there is a moment of exaltation scarcely to be found elsewhere in modern literature. Then you feel that the work you have had to do has been worth while. There is, however, yet another difficulty, that of language. This is due partly to a tendency to break out into verbal experiments—absence of punctuation, small letters for capitals, paragraphs with no beginning nor end, changes from roman type to italics, and the like. But it is due much more to the intricacies and at times the sheer badness of the style, which we will consider later. For all this, William Faulkner has been potentially the greatest novelist of the last ten or fifteen years. I do not think he is going to realise that potentiality, but his work still remains individual, powerful, exasperating and often magnificent.



*Soldier's Pay* is a good introduction, and the story is worth repeating, because it foreshadows so much in his later work. The setting is the state of Georgia after the last war. A war hero has returned to his home. He has been injured in an air crash and to all intents and purposes is an imbecile. At once we see that Faulkner grew up in the disillusioned generation which followed the Four Years' War. He is a romantic, out of joint with the times. He is ready to turn to the land and the people around him and to their legends to construct for himself a romantic myth, but he is too much of a realist not to be aware how far from this the real world falls. He becomes cynical, bitter, sentimental, violent, escapist, revolutionary, reactionary in turn and at times apparently all together.

It is therefore in a mood of cynicism that Faulkner writes of the soldier who returns for his pay. His father and family try to pretend that there is nothing the matter with him. They refuse to acknowledge that he is not in full possession of his faculties. His fiancée too refuses to break off her engagement until the strain is too much for her and she gives herself impulsively to a young man who has been hanging around her for some time. Then, when she sees him again, she cuts him dead. The only people who are really honest about the returned warrior are a soldier who found him on a tram and instituted himself as a sort of unofficial nurse, and a woman they picked up on the road. These two purposeless

outcasts are the forerunners of a type which often appears in Faulkner's work. They are people who get "mixed up" in things. They are involved with the affairs of others, and though to some extent they remain spectators, their natural sympathy makes them take on responsibilities which need not have been theirs. It is not improbable that this type represents Faulkner's idea of the function of the artist and more particularly of the novelist. The girl who in a sort of despair gives herself to a man without love is another typical character. In parts too there is a foretaste of the way in which Faulkner was to write of experience—a curious, detached way, as if the person were somehow separate from the experience, as if he were only a body in which the experience was taking place.

This becomes more and more evident in his later books, and the characters become almost automata which react to various impulses from outside. Life has got beyond their control. They do not understand the motives by which they act, they find themselves involved in events which they had not wished to bring about:

"She could hear silence in a thick rustling as he moved toward her through it, thrusting it aside, and she began to say Something is going to happen to me. She was saying it to the old man with yellow clots for eyes. 'Something is happening to me!' she screamed at him, sitting in his chair in the sunlight, his hands crossed on the top of his stick. 'I told you it was!' she screamed, voiding the words like hot silent bubbles into the bright silence about them until he turned his head and the two phlegm-clots above her where she lay tossing and thrashing on the rough, sunny boards. 'I told you! I told you all the time.'"<sup>1</sup>

For Faulkner realised that once you have a conception of Natural Man as a creature fulfilling only his natural desires and impulses you are dangerously near to fatalism and the denial of free-will. This is indeed the case with many people, for they see the desires and impulses as reactions from certain external stimuli. Man therefore becomes a creature badgered about by circumstance. This, on the whole, is the way in which Faulkner saw Man, and because he was a romantic at heart, with an inner vision of

<sup>1</sup> *Sanctuary* (Chatto and Windus).



the glory of unfallen Man, he became bitter. His belief that Man was helpless in the hands of circumstance expressed itself in a flamboyant sort of fatalism by which the individual and families were doomed to violent death. Many of his characters seem to live their lives making wild and futile gestures against fate.

In *Sartoris*, Faulkner's second novel, we are introduced to such a family. The Sartoris men have always acted with a sort of inherited recklessness. In the Civil War they had carried out an incredible raid behind the Federal Lines to rescue some horses. Now, at the time of the novel, the youngest Sartoris has returned from the Four Years' War in Europe. He has endured the war, but he cannot endure the post-war disillusion, and he commits suicide. Being a Sartoris, however, he cannot be content with knife or gun or poison, but has to hire an aeroplane to provide himself with a spectacular death.

*Sartoris* lays the scene for most of the future novels—the hot, dusty little towns of the southern states, where the days of slavery are not forgotten, and people still brood over the loss of the Civil War. It is a scene which has since been made familiar in many *Gone-with-the-Windy* books and films. It has been exploited, sentimentalised, romanticised. But to Faulkner's imagination it is very real.

*Sartoris* is written in a queer, wandering technique. There is no chronology; past and present get mixed up together, as, indeed, they tend to more and more in Faulkner's later works. For the first few novels he was particularly concerned with technical problems. The first quarter of *The Sound and the Fury*, for instance, is seen through the eyes of a congenital idiot, and the meaning of it cannot be grasped till you have read the rest of the book. Many of these experiments did not really come off, but they are signs of an alert and adventurous mind, never satisfied with its achievements, and always seeking new methods.



In Faulkner's middle period the moralist in him came to the front. The moralist had, of course, no logical right to be there at all, but there he was—a rather unsympathetic American Puritan. There was a hardening of the heart and a stiffening of the style.

*Sanctuary*, the first of the moralities, starts with a directness which is curiously unlike the contortions of the plot:

"The drinking man knelt beside the spring. 'You've got a pistol in that pocket, I suppose,' he said.

"Across the spring Popeye appeared to contemplate him with two knobs of soft black rubber. 'I'm asking you,' Popeye said. 'What's that in your pocket?'

"The other man's coat was still across his arm. He lifted his other hand toward the coat, out of one pocket of which protruded a crushed felt hat, from the other a book. 'Which pocket?' he said.

" 'Don't show me,' Popeye said. 'Tell me.'

"The other man stopped his hand. 'It's a book.'

" 'What book?' Popeye said.

" 'Just a book. The kind that people read. Some people do.' "

In this cinematographic way we are introduced to Popeye and the rest of his gang. For *Sanctuary* is a gangster story. But Popeye and the others are not Chicago super-gangsters; they are a group of wretched dealers in illicit liquor who live in a small house in the country of a southern state. Popeye is no gangster-hero, but an ineffective, sexually-impotent, sadistic, petty figure of evil who has been thrown into his position of power by the society on which he depends. To this group comes a selfish little brat of a college girl. Faulkner holds her up as a specimen of the youth of modern America. Obviously he hates her and feels that she deserves what is coming to her. And what is coming to her is so startling that it cannot be told out of its context without seeming incredibly crude. In its context, however, it is a delayed-action bomb which eventually explodes with great effectiveness. Temple, the girl, goes off with Popeye, eventually gives false evidence which condemns a friend of his for Popeye's crime against her. The mob storm the jail and burn the friend in the market place, while Popeye escapes, only to be hanged for a murder which he hadn't committed.

In *Light in August*, the moral tone is still there, but with it a new note of pity. The characters are less individually to blame than those of *Sanctuary*. The style, too, is richer, a development of the Stein Song with all Faulkner's poetic imagination in it. It moves slowly, and the air is heavy as before a thunderstorm, and the sky

is lit with the glow which gives the book its name. At the beginning:

"Sitting beside the road, watching the wagon mount the hill towards her, Lena thinks, 'I have come from Alabama: a fur piece. All the way from Alabama a-walking. A fur piece.' Thinking *although I have not been quite a month on the road I am already in Mississippi, further from home than I have ever been before. I am now further from Doane's Mill than I have been since I was twelve years old.*

"She had never even been to Doane's Mill until after her father and mother died, though six or eight times a year she went to the town on Saturday, in the wagon, in a mail-order dress and her bare feet flat in the wagon bed and her shoes wrapped in a piece of paper beside her on the seat. She would put on the shoes just before the wagon reached town. After she got to be a big girl she would ask her father to stop the wagon at the edge of town and she would get down and walk. She would not tell her father why she wanted to walk in instead of riding. He thought that it was because of the smooth streets, the sidewalks. But it was because she believed that the people who saw her and whom she passed on foot would believe that she lived in the town too."<sup>1</sup>

There is much in this paragraph which reveals the greatness of Faulkner: the topographical and biographical details coming in so naturally that you scarcely notice them; the understanding glimpse about the shoes; and, above all, the style, simple yet involved, which suggests so well the thoughts of the girl. She is a woman now, and she is going to have a child, and she has left home and is tramping the roads to find the father, Lucas Burch. She is searching for him in complete trust, feeling sure that he will marry her and that only an accident has delayed him from coming to her. She gets a lift in a cart and as she approaches the town of Jefferson, there is a light in the sky. A woman, a Miss Burden, has been murdered and her home set on fire. Slowly we learn the story. Miss Burden was hated by her neighbours because she was a "nigger-lover," one who had sympathised with the Negroes. She was a fairly wealthy woman and in a hut on her estate had lived two men, boot-leggers, Christmas and Brown. Brown was the man who, under the name of Burch, had seduced

the girl, but it is Christmas with whom we are most to be concerned. The action now switches back to the time of the childhood of Christmas. He was an orphan—found on the doorstep in the traditional way. At the orphanage it was suspected that he had Negro blood in him and he was sent to a Negro school. From then onwards he found himself persecuted and despised because of his race, till in the end he met Miss Burden, the “nigger-lover.” She has been driven half-out of her mind by the hatred of her neighbours, and she seizes upon him as a lover until she appals him by her sensuality. Then he kills her. At the end, Fate, symbolised by the curious fascist figure of The Player, hunts Christmas and kills him brutally and without emotion. There are also two typical Faulkner characters who play no important part on the action, but who are involved in the affairs of others. One is Byron Bunch, to whom the girl is directed in mistake for Burch, and who feels himself bound to look after her, even though she is in love with another man. The other is the Reverend Gail Highblower, D.D., whose wife had thrown herself out of the window of a brothel in Memphis. He himself had been driven nearly out of his head by his wife’s unfaithfulness, yet he had always forgiven her and always tried to understand.

“Then Sunday he would be again in the pulpit, with his wild hands and his wild eager rapt voice in which like phantoms God and salvation and the galloping horses and his dead grandfather thundered, while below him the elders sat, and the congregation, puzzled and outraged.”

In the end the congregation hound him out of his pulpit, but he remains kindly, tolerant and understanding, and it is to him that Byron Bunch turns for help with the girl when her child is born.

In *Light in August* Natural Man is not so much frustrated in his desires as controlled by them. And as his desires are the reaction from the outward stimuli, they are helpless in the hands of circumstance. The moralist is there, but he does not condemn his characters, he pities them. This pity is seen more clearly in *Pylon*, a book which stands midway between Faulkner’s middle and later periods. In *Pylon* the characters have little personality in the usual sense. They react not so much to conscious and rational causes as to forces over which they have no control

and which they do not understand. They are frustrated at every turn in the fulfilment of their natural desires, and in this book Faulkner lays the blame on modern mechanised civilisation. As a romantic, there was at the back of his mind a vision of Man in the natural happiness of his unfallen days, which was to express itself, as it did in Lawrence, in a deliberate cult of the primitive—in his case the American backwoods. This was to come later, but already he was showing his hatred of an artificial and commercialised world.

In *Pylon* Faulkner's prose begins to practise the convolutions which make parts of *The Wild Palms* almost unreadable, but the monologues of the reporter, in which the best of the book is written, have a new fascination. His speech is a development of Miss Stein's style, full now of newspaper slang, and with a flat, mechanical rhythm like the tapping of a typewriter. To be fully appreciated; it needs to be read aloud with the lungs trying to keep up with the eye, though it is doubtful whether the brain will keep up with the lungs. It is a strange style, yet it is very effective for its purpose, and presents a portrait of these dehumanised people, magnified above life-size in the mist of the reporter's talk. The reader will often feel dizzy, but never dull.

The reporter becomes involved with a group of characters who travel in an aero-circus. There are Roger Schumann (the pilot), Laverne (his wife), and the parachute jumper. There are also Jiggs (the mechanic) and a small boy who is Laverne's son. Who is his father is not known, for Laverne belongs both to Schumann and the parachute jumper. When the boy was born—

"... the parachute guy got out the dice and says to her [Laverne] 'Do you want to catch these?' and she said 'Roll them' and the dice come out and Schumann rolled high, and that afternoon they fetched the J.P. out on the gasoline truck and so hers and the kid's name is Schumann."

Schumann flies in air races for ridiculously small prizes, and now, when money is needed because Laverne is going to have another child, he crashes his plane. He and the reporter struggle hard to find another. Finally, they get hold of an out-of-date machine which is obviously unsafe, but which they manage to get qualified. The plane crashes and he is killed. The reporter, who

all the time has been in love with Laverne, is conscious of his part in Schumann's death and says nothing, so that at the end the child is left with Schumann's father, and Laverne and the parachute jumper go off together.

But the plain story tells little of the power of this book. The people of the aero-circus are seen as creatures moving almost mechanically at the bidding of forces outside them. The reporter is fascinated with them. He is a re-incarnation of Byron Bunch, and he is moved by an intense pity for them. He tells the Editor:

"She's his wife: they have been married almost ever since the kid was born six years ago in a hangar in California. Yair, this day Schumann comes down at whatever town it was in Iowa or Indiana or wherever it was she was a sophomore in the high school back before they had the air mail for farmers to quit ploughing and look up at; in the high school at recess, and so maybe that was why she come out without a hat even and got into the front seat of one of those Jennies the army used to sell them for cancelled stamps or whatever it was. And maybe she sent a postcard back from the next cow pasture to the aunt or whoever it was that was expecting her to come home to dinner, granted that they have kinfolks or are descended from human beings, and he taught her to jump parachutes. Because they ain't human like us; they couldn't turn those pylons like they do if they had human blood and senses and they wouldn't want to or dare to if they just had human brains. Burn them like this one tonight<sup>1</sup> and they don't even holler in the fire; crash one and it ain't even blood when you haul him out: it's cylinder oil the same as in the crank-case."

There is bitter irony behind this as well as the wisecracks thrown out so casually that an English ear may easily miss them ("airmail for farmers to quit ploughing and look up at," "Jennies the army used to sell them for cancelled stamps").

The reporter is aware, too, that these people are driven on by some force which is not felt by ordinary people; they have abandoned themselves, desperately, to a fate which they feel is outside them and beyond their understanding. "They ain't human," he says again and again, and he is bitter, not only because of the pity he has for them, but because of the love he has for the woman. They are misfits; they do not feel the desires of

<sup>1</sup> There has just been a fatal accident at the aerodrome.

ordinary folk. They have passed outside the wish for happiness or fame or even money, for, except for necessary everyday transactions—

“they don’t need money; it ain’t money they are after any more than it’s glory because the glory can only last until the next race and so maybe it ain’t even till tomorrow. And they don’t need money except only now and then when they come in contact with the human race like in a hotel to sleep or eat now and then or maybe to buy a pair of pants or a skirt to keep the police off them.”<sup>1</sup>

It is hard to stop quoting. There is a fascination in this breathless, ironic flow of words. We see the reporter, spitting out his bitter wise-cracks, his heart splitting with compassion. He is a lonely, bewildered, beaten man and one who seems to have in his make-up something of Faulkner himself.

Here, then, is a picture of Natural Man, moving in a civilisation which frustrates and exploits him, and driven on by desires which he cannot control and which he will never be able to satisfy.



After *Pylon* Faulkner began to turn his back on modern industrial civilisation, and those characteristics which he shared with Lawrence became more prominent in his work. In his return to the “primitive,” however, he did not go among other races; he turned instead to the civilisation around him in the southern states. Here is a society which in parts is relatively untouched by the commercialism of the North. It is a society still largely agricultural, and one which inherits the traditions of the patriarchal age of slavery. Faulkner began to be preoccupied with the decay of this society, and especially with the problem of the relation between the whites and the blacks. He began to brood, too, on the Civil War and wrote a novel about it (*The Unvanquished*—the title tells much). Then he began to write about the backwoods, the forests and swamps of the Mississippi Delta, where Nature is to be found as much in the raw as anywhere in a country of Western civilisation.

In *The Wild Palms* Faulkner told his first story of the backwoods.

<sup>1</sup> *Pylon* (Chatto and Windus).

*The Wild Palms* is not one of Faulkner's more successful works. It consists of two stories told in alternate chapters. The stories have not the least connection each with the other; they are not about the same characters, nor the same time, nor the same places. All they have in common is that each includes a rather messy child-birth. If he likes, the reader can skip the alternate chapters and read each story separately. The first story, "The Wild Palms," need not concern us; but the second, "Old Man," returns to the great river of American legend and literature, the Mississippi, the river of Mark Twain, whose prose frequently anticipated Faulkner's.

In the *Huckleberry Finn* tradition, too, is the enthusiasm for hunting and the life of the woods, and the tough sentimentalism which gets more and more marked in Faulkner. Here, for instance is the death of a dog (Lion):

"They carried Lion into the woods, or Boon carried him that is, wrapped in a quilt from his bed, just as he had refused to let anyone else touch Lion yesterday until the doctor got there; Boon carrying Lion, and the boy and General Compson and Walter and still almost fifty of them following with lanterns and lighted pine-knots. . . . And Boon would let nobody else dig the grave either and lay Lion in it and cover him and then General Compson stood at the head of it while the blaze and smoke of the pine-knots streamed away among the winter branches and spoke as he would have spoken over a man."

But unfortunately the style of *The Wild Palms* has none of the lucidity of that of *Huckleberry Finn*. In this book Faulkner's prose is at its most tortuous. Sentences sprawl over the pages like a river in flood—which, indeed, is what they are describing. Every sort of digression and aside is used. Parentheses are inserted between the verb and the subject and even between the adjective and the noun. Sometimes these parentheses are so long that the eye has to travel back to the first bracket to discover what the main sentence is about. Certainly the prose does in a way match the flush and flood of the waters, and the strange, bewildering adventures of the two creatures who are afloat on them, but nothing can excuse such persistent and deliberate obscurity.

In his most recent work of fiction, *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner



sings the praises of the land with a Rousseau-like enthusiasm. The book consists of seven tales all centred around the McCaslin plantation in Tennessee at various times during the last hundred years. The longest and most magnificent tells of the training of a huge dog to hunt a bear which had wandered about the woods so long that it had become a legend. There is a long, exciting chase in which the reader has to do his own hunting for the meaning as he hacks his way through the undergrowth of Faulkner's words. Certainly the wildness of the woods is wonderfully evoked, but the story is exciting and the obstructions of the style are annoying. The dog brings down the bear and is itself killed, and has the burial and funeral oration already mentioned. In another story, an old slave becomes obsessed with the treasure which he believes to be buried on the estate. In the first story of all, two slave-owners play cards for the price of a slave and the betrothal of a sister. It is told in a curious, detached manner, as if the author were no more than a camera, recording what he hears and sees, but understanding not a word. In this, and also in the gestures of the characters, it reminds you of one of the Wild Western films of the silent days with the captions left out:

"So Uncle Buck shuffled the cards and Mr. Hubert cut them. Then he took up the deck and dealt in turn until Uncle Buck and Mr. Hubert had five. And Uncle Buck looked at his hand a long time and then said two cards and he gave them to him, and Mr. Hubert looked at his hand quick and said one card and he gave it to him and Mr. Hubert flipped his discard on to the two which Uncle Buck had discarded and slid the new card into his hand and opened it out and looked at it quick again and closed it and looked at Uncle Buck and said, 'Well? Did you help them threes?'

" 'No,' Uncle Buck said.

" 'Well I did,' Mr. Hubert said. He shot his hand across the table so that the cards fell face-up in front of Uncle Buck and they were three kings and two fives, and said, 'By God, Buck McCaslin, you have met your match at last.' "<sup>1</sup>

Faulkner's gymnastic way of telling a tale is not very well suited to the short story, but it succeeds in this book because the parts

<sup>1</sup> *Go Down, Moses* (Chatto and Windus).

are linked together by two themes—indeed, it is not so much in question whether he has written seven good short stories as to whether he has not found a new way of writing a novel.

The first theme is announced in the opening paragraph:

“Isaac McCaslin, ‘Uncle Ike,’ past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated any more, a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one.”

After this it appears to have been forgotten—indeed, the first page seems as if it were only a piece of Faulkner’s cussedness. Yet the fact remains that Ike McCaslin is the first person in the book and that he had inherited the McCaslin estate. But when he was still quite young he had repudiated the inheritance, accepting only a small allowance for income, and leaving the management of the estate in the hands of McCaslin Edmonds, his cousin on the distaff side. Ike McCaslin had never owned—

“but one object more than he could wear and carry in his pockets and hands at one time, and this was the narrow iron cot and the stained lean mattress which he used camping in the woods for deer and bear or for fishing or simply because he loved the woods.”

Ike McCaslin had loved the woods since he was a child. We learn in “The Old People” how he had shot his first buck when he was a boy. Then, as at the earlier time when he had shot his first running rabbit, his tutor and guide had been Sam Fathers. Sam Fathers was “an old man of seventy who had been a Negro for two generations now, but whose face and bearing were still those of the Chickashaw chief who had been his father.” He was, indeed, the son of Ikkemotubbe, an Indian chief, and of a quadroon slave woman. Sam Fathers knows the woods as do none of the white or Negro hunters. He knows where he can find the biggest buck of all, and he greets it with the totem salute of his ancestors: “Oleh Chief, Grandfather.” He knows too, and has known for years the tracks and habits of Ben, the old bear. Every year he went with the parties which hunted Ben and failed to kill him, until he trapped and trained the huge dog which was to bring him down in the end. And when the bear died, Sam Fathers died, for somehow his life was linked up with that of this last

symbol of the wild. It was then that Ike McCaslin realised that he would never own the land he was to inherit. The McCaslins could never own it; they were interlopers. The real owner, if there was an owner, was Sam Fathers. In Sam Fathers ran the blood of the race who had hunted and lived on the land centuries before the whites and the blacks had been seen or heard of. And Sam Fathers was dead and had left no children. So Isaac McCaslin acknowledged that he had no right to the land which now bore his family's name. He gave up his claim to the estate and went to live in—

“the cheap frame bungalow in Jefferson which his wife's father gave them on their marriage and which his wife had willed to him at her death and which he had pretended to accept, acquiesce to, to humour her, ease her going but which was not his, will or not.”

This is an expression of a clear blood-and-soil mystic, similar to that of Lawrence, but with the emphasis on soil rather than blood. Sam Fathers cannot claim to be of “pure racial stock,” but this is less important than the fact that his Indian forefathers were indigenous to the land where now his white bosses farm and hunt.

The Sam Fathers theme provides the emotional climax of the book, but the other theme provides the structure. This is the tracing of the two lines of descendants left by the eldest McCaslin—the white and the black. It is presented in the form of a puzzle: Why should Old McCaslin leave a substantial sum of money to the descendants of Tomey's Turl, one of his black slaves? We know that the mother, Tomey or Thomasina, was the daughter of McCaslin by the first slave woman he had ever bought. But it seems unlikely that he would have treated her grandchildren so well on this account only. Then in a roundabout way we learn that Tomey's Turl is not only McCaslin's grandson, he is his son, for Tomey was not only his daughter, she was his mistress. Because of this incestuous relationship, Tomey's Turl is therefore wholly McCaslin on his father's side as well as half McCaslin on his mother's side. In fact, the McCaslin blood flows purer in the bastard black descendants than it does in the legitimate whites. In the final story, from which the book is named, the two

bloodstreams meet again in the person of a young negro who is sentenced to death for killing a policeman, and given a magnificent funeral at his home town. In the different stories Faulkner surveys the breakdown of the old slave system and the emergence of present-day society in the southern states. But he is concerned in particular with the relation between the whites and the blacks. He has been preoccupied with this racial problem for some time now, and it appears to have taken on for him a special significance. Indeed, he seems to have created for himself a private mythology in which the names of places and people have become charged for him with emotional significance which is not necessarily understood by the reader. The white-and-black theme had been the subject of *Absalom, Absalom!*, a long novel of about the time of *Pylon*. It is a remarkable work, slow and involved, moving in time between the Civil War and the present day. William Sutpen has two children, a boy and a girl. The boy has a passionate friendship with Charles Bon, who becomes engaged to the girl. At the end of the first chapter Bon is found killed, shot by the boy. The rest of the book is like a detective story in structure (like *Trent's Last Case*,<sup>1</sup> in particular) as we try to discover the reason for the killing. First of all we learn something of Bon's history. He was older than Sutpen's son and was a leader of the fashionable set at the university where the boy met him. He had a mistress, an octoroon, with whom he had gone through a form of marriage. That, presumably, was why the boy shot him. But we do not feel that this is a satisfactory explanation: the boy admired him too much to quarrel about his way of living. Then we learn that William Sutpen had a hand in it. He had been married twice—the first marriage having been dissolved when it was discovered to be illegal. The boy and girl were children of the second marriage. Sutpen now tells the boy that Bon is his son by the first wife—Bon is therefore the girl's half-brother. Gradually, however, it turns out that even this is not the reason for the killing. The boy loved Bon so passionately that he would not interfere when he knew this. So William Sutpen told him why he had divorced his first wife—he had found that she had negro blood in her. This, in the Faulkner tradition, leaves the boy no choice and

<sup>1</sup> By E. C. Bentley. This is a mystery with three successive solutions, the last of which debunks the two former. It was intended as a parody, but is itself an excellent piece of detective fiction.

he shoots Bon. He was ready to let his sister commit incest, but not miscegenation.

There is more behind this than mere racial prejudice. Young Sutpen does not admire Bon the less when he shoots him. There is no suggestion that Faulkner thinks the blacks are an inferior race. Yet it is not just sympathy he has for them—he sympathises with the underdogs, certainly, but they may be whites as well as blacks. The Negroes in his novels have often a nobility which the whites lack: Sam Fathers, the Negro with Red Indian blood, is by far the most dignified figure in *Go Down, Moses*. Yet there is a feeling that the blacks are different from the whites in more than the skin; that theirs is a different way of life, a different sort of consciousness. It would be ludicrous to suggest that he intended the white and the black races to represent good and evil in the ordinary sense, but it does seem that the Negroes, in Faulkner's mythology, have something of the same nature as the Dark Gods in that of Lawrence. For Faulkner, like Lawrence, is at heart a dualist.

This dualism, in which the blacks are seen as symbols of that which does not belong to the white man's consciousness, appears in the short story, "Elly." A young girl meets a man at a friend's house. She learns that he is a Negro and makes love to him recklessly. Then when she is going to have a child, she wrecks a car and kills him and her grandmother so that her father may not be told of it. The despair with which she forces herself into the affair is significant from the point of view of this study:

"This time she did not look in when she passed her grandmother's door. Neither did she lean against her own door to cry. But she was panting, saying aloud against the door in thin exultation: 'A nigger. A nigger. I wonder what she would say if she knew about that.'"<sup>1</sup>

This is very like those women of Lawrence's novels who give themselves to Mexican Indians or gypsies. There is a search through the Negro blood for the "dark consciousness" of pure sensation and for contact with the primitive. Dualism explains much in Faulkner that is otherwise puzzling. It explains his mythology, his cult of the South and the backwoods, his praise of blood and soil, his preoccupation with the question of race, his

<sup>1</sup> "Elly," from *Dr. Martino* (Chatto & Windus).

contradictions, even his extreme puritanism. Perhaps it may also explain the faults in his prose style, for the creed of dualism, since the time of the decadence of Zoroastrianism, has always appeared in confused and grotesque forms.

Faulkner's picture of Natural Man, therefore, is more complete than that of Lawrence. Lawrence was satisfied to show him as one for whom love was the central experience. Faulkner, like Hemingway, shows him also as a fighting, killing, hungering, struggling animal. There is much pity and tenderness in the picture, and much bitterness too, for Faulkner is a romantic, at loggerheads with the times. But he was unable to strip Natural Man to his essentials, as did Montherlant and the early Hemingway. He had to try to surmount his doctrine and to find some purpose for man's life or some explanation of it in a confused mysticism of race and soil. The dualism behind this has made him one of the most difficult and puzzling writers of our time. He is also one of the most fascinating.

### *William Saroyan*

Hemingway and Faulkner have between them founded a school of American fiction. Since this is not a book of literary history there is no need to mention names, except perhaps that of John Steinbeck. Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* is a piece of simplification in the tough style—effective, but something of a stunt. The *Grapes of Wrath* is less interesting technically, but it shows an attempt to combine the Natural Man manner with a doctrine of Liberal Man. The mother's talk about the people is very Pelagian—a point which was emphasised at the end of the film version.

One American writer cannot be overlooked, however. William Saroyan owes much to both Hemingway and Faulkner, yet he is completely and deliciously himself. Saroyan has already influenced the modern conception of the short story, and it looks as if he may have a similar influence on the drama. We are not now concerned with his technical innovations, however. In the short story, what he did was to do away with the conjuring tricks of O. Henry and so on, and give us just the conjurer's patter. At first he was self-conscious about this:

"I am writing a serious story, perhaps one of the most serious I shall ever write. That is why I am being flippant. Readers of

Sherwood Anderson will begin to understand what I am saying after a while; they will know that my laughter is rather sad."

Often he keeps on insisting that what he is giving the reader is a story, however inapparent this may be. Indeed, he resembles Wordsworth when he was trying to introduce a new form of story-poem:

"What more I have to say is short,  
And you must kindly take it:  
It is no tale; but, should you think,  
Perhaps a tale you'll make it."<sup>1</sup>

Later on, however, Saroyan becomes more at ease, and the slickness of his method well suits his manner.

In spite of self-consciousness, in spite of deliberate experimenting, what Saroyan has done is to put innocence and simplicity back into literature. There is a certain amount of pose in this, of course, but the pose is so natural to the man that we readily forgive him. In the first place, it appears as a reaction to the over-intellectualisation of literature and art. In this sense, therefore, it is part of the revolt against rationalism, a revolt which we have seen in many different forms. Saroyan enjoys himself in complete irresponsibility. He no longer acknowledges any standards of taste or criticism, and he revels in his new freedom:

"That year is the year I began to get over cowboy pictures. If they were being shown I'd see them through, of course, but I didn't like them. I liked comedies, but especially the ones with Snub Pollard in them, and a young zany named Al St. Joy. I liked love stories too. I liked the outdoor ones where the girl would be somebody wonderful and good like Mary Pickford and it seemed like the whole world was against a little kid like that with nothing but goodness in her heart, and then it would happen, the little girl's goodness would knock hell out of all the viciousness and she'd get the bad ones put in jail where they belonged. And all like that."<sup>2</sup>

This is part of an inverted highbrow pose. But it is refreshing all the same. In a way, too, it is a more complete portrayal of

<sup>1</sup> "Simon Lee."

<sup>2</sup> "The Year of Heaven," from *Peace, It's Wonderful* (Faber and Faber).

Natural Man even than Montherlant's. Montherlant threw aside all morality, but he kept the critical values of art. Saroyan throws these over as well.

More interesting than the *naïveté* of Saroyan is his innocence. This enables us to link up with our definition of Natural Man, as the state of Man before the Fall. Saroyan's characters live in that state of primeval innocence. The world in which they walk about is still Eden:

"It was a wonderful year, that separate year of 1917. It was the year of the movies. It was the year in which I left the world and went to heaven in the picture theatres. That was the only time I ever went to heaven and I went in rags, as it were, and by foot. I went with a dirty face, not a face glowing with holy light; and sometimes I went with a face wet with the rain of winter; with hands cold and dirty; sometimes even my shoes would be wet, all soft, and my coat too."

Of course, even in Eden things do not always go right; Man is innocent, but there is still the snake. Things go wrong sometimes and people are unhappy and it isn't their fault and they don't know why:

"For hours he watched the dark land, hungering for it. The level plains, the bare hills, the lonely brooding trees.

"My God, he said.

"He began to dream, his heart talking to itself.

"*Seven times the sheep have wakened and seven times it is the same afternoon. There is still light upon the earth.*"<sup>1</sup>

Brief as this is, it is a true romantic landscape, like a picture by Samuel Palmer.

Saroyan's most attractive picture of innocence is to be found in *My Name is Aram*, a group of stories about an Armenian boy in America. The adventures of the boys have a Huckleberry Finn flavour, but the adventures of the many magnificent uncles comes straight from the annals of Eden:

"My uncle Melik was just about the worst farmer that ever lived. He was too imaginative and poetic for his own good. What

<sup>1</sup> "Comedy is Where You Die and They Don't Bury You Because You Can Still Walk," from *Peace, It's Wonderful*.



he wanted was beauty. He wanted to plant it and see it grow. I myself planted over one hundred pomegranate trees for my uncle one year back there in the good old days of poetry and youth in the world. I drove a John Deere tractor too, and so did my uncle. It was all pure æsthetics, not agriculture. My uncle just liked the idea of planting trees and watching them grow.”<sup>1</sup>

And then the snake appears:

“Only they wouldn’t grow.”

But Uncle Melik is not defeated and we love him all the more when he says:

“Here in this awful desolation a garden shall flower, fountains of cold water shall bubble out of the earth, and all things of beauty shall come into being.

“Yes, sir, I said.”

Of course, if you live in the middle of modern commercial civilisation, you cannot go on thinking that Man is in Eden unless you are very unobservant, or you turn a deliberate blind eye. Saroyan is not unobservant, but his blind eye sometimes looks very like a wink.

In the last story of *My Name is Aram* he more or less explains himself. An evangelist asked him if he were saved. All he has to do to be saved is to believe:

“Is that all I have to do? I said.

“That’s all, son, said the missionary.

“O.K. I said. *I believe*. . . .

“I thought I was kidding the old padre of Salt Lake City, getting back my vast book-learning and anti-religious poise, but I was sadly mistaken, because unwittingly I *had* been saved. In less than ten minutes after the bus left Salt Lake City I was believing everything, left and right, as the missionary had said, and it’s been that way with me ever since.”<sup>2</sup>

It is not, perhaps, very practicable advice, but it is pleasant to know someone who gives it.

<sup>1</sup> “The Pomegranate Trees,” from *My Name is Aram* (Faber and Faber).

<sup>2</sup> “A Word to Scoffers,” from *My Name is Aram*.

## IMPERFECT MAN

12

*Imperfect Man*

LIBERAL Man and Natural Man are both simplifications of the real nature of Man. They are attempts to explain his being and purpose on one plane—that of progress or that of animal desires. The traditional view, however, is that Man has being on two planes, the material and the spiritual; that his purpose is to be seen in relation to some will or plan which exists outside of himself; that his actions are to be judged in the light of transcendent values. This is the view which has persisted through the centuries of Western civilisation. It is also the Christian point of view. It is not exclusively Christian, of course, as it was to be found before the birth of Christ and is held to-day by many unbelievers and is shared also by some other religions, such as Islam.

Details of the code of morality may differ between various times and various societies, but the conception of the three ultimate values, Truth, Beauty, Goodness, does not change very much. By any code of morality which is worth the name at all it is agreed that Man falls short of the ideal by which he has to judge himself; Man therefore is imperfect. In Christianity this is expressed in the doctrine of the Fall and of Original Sin.

In this book so far we have considered two groups of writers and thinkers who have rejected the idea of Original Sin. Nor is that rejection confined to them; it is implicit in much, perhaps in most, of the popular thought of the present day. But the traditional view of Man also remained implicit in popular thought, often quite unconsciously. During the last fifty or sixty years there has been a tendency for it to disappear from the work of acknowledged leaders of literature, but this seems now to be undergoing a change. It is too early to say that there is a definite

“movement” in literature to restate the Christian view of life with the same vigour that Shaw and Wells stated the liberal view and Lawrence and Hemingway the view of Natural Man. But contemporary with Lawrence were two men, James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, who combined the traditional view of the nature of Man with a gift for technical experiment, and who have had great influence on the younger writers. The war and the events which preceded the war have helped to destroy belief in either Pelagian Man or Natural Man and many people have become conscious of a need to make clear in their own minds the assumptions on which they act.

The third part of this book will deal with those modern writers who assume that Man is an imperfect and sinful creature. This is quite consistent with Christianity, but it is not the whole Christian teaching about sin and redemption. We must not be surprised, therefore, that a good many of the writers we shall now consider are not professing Christians. Indeed, some of them are so blasphemous and bawdy that they may seem on the surface to be violently anti-Christian, but it should be realised that their view of the nature of Man is much nearer that of orthodox Christianity than was that of many of the more “respectable” writers who preceded them.

## James Joyce and T. F. Powys

JAMES JOYCE is a difficult subject for a critic unless he can presume on the reader's close knowledge of the text. Joyce's main importance is in the variety and originality of his technical experiments rather than in his contribution to modern thought. It would digress too much to give these experiments the attention they deserve; moreover, this has been done very thoroughly by others,<sup>1</sup> but in order to make my remarks intelligible to those who are unacquainted with Joyce's work I shall have to give a brief outline of the structure of *Ulysses*.

While he was still in his teens, Joyce showed sign of his originality. *Dubliners*, which he wrote about that time, is a landmark in the development of the short story. The stories are sketches of life among the middle classes in Dublin in the early part of this century. The subjects are much what you might have found in the work of any contemporary writer (it should be remembered that most of these stories were written before *Mr. Polly*!), but there is a delicacy in the character-drawing and in the conversation which was far beyond that of the heavy-handed realists. Joyce is concerned with his characters as an artist, not as a sociologist. Though he may be at times detached and a little ironic, yet he does not criticise the society which he pictures. Behind all the stories is implicit the morality of orthodox Catholicism. Sometimes Joyce shows the difference between practice and precept, but his irony is always kindly. There is, for instance, the story called "Grace," in which a wife sets out to reform a man who has been injured in an accident when drunk. Her husband had been a Protestant who was received into the Church on his marriage. She calls in several friends to help her. They are just as worldly and backsliding as he, but they are all Catholic born. They gather round his bedside and turn the conversation to spiritual things and finally persuade him to attend a one-day retreat for business men which is to be held in a Dublin church. This synopsis cannot

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Stuart Gilbert in *James Joyce's "Ulysses."*

suggest the subtlety of the story nor the gorgeous dialogue round the sickbed, but it shows that Joyce's approach to moral problems was broadly orthodox. As one who had lapsed from the Catholic faith, he was doubtful of the efficacy of the means of grace suggested by the friends, but he had no doubt whatever of the reality of sin and the necessity for repentance and redemption. He realised that the men were, strictly speaking, hypocrites, but this did not arouse in him the indignation of a Puritan moralist nor the scorn of a satirist, for he knew that all men were frail and that hypocrisy is by no means a rare sin. He knew, too, that underneath the hypocrisy there was a little leaven of sincerity. Joyce's attitude to human sin always remained kindly and tolerant, the natural habit of thought of one brought up in a community where the means of grace, confession, absolution, penance and the sacraments, are, as it were, ready to hand in everyday life.

The Catholic background is shown in greater detail in the autobiographical novel, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which was published in 1916, but written some years earlier. In this we learn how Stephen Daedalus was brought up in a Catholic home and sent to a Jesuit seminary with the intention of taking Orders. When he reaches adolescence he becomes restless. He escapes from the school in the evenings and wanders about the streets of Dublin, fascinated by the life which he knows he has to renounce. At last, he begins to visit the brothels. Then comes the retreat in the seminary. The father who is conducting it preaches a series of sermons on sin, judgment and hell. The latter is described in language almost medieval in its horror and richness of imagery. Stephen's conscience explodes within him like a magnetic mine. He has a violent conversion, and goes out into the city to find a church where he may confess—he still cannot face up to one of his own teachers and directors. The scene in the confessional is described with simplicity and understanding, even with tenderness. After this Stephen becomes what is technically known as "scrupulous." He obeys the rule of the house to the last letter. He imposes upon himself a rigorous system of prayer, meditation, fasting and discipline. In the effort to subdue the flesh, he goes so far as to walk about with his gaze on the ground to deny the "lust of the eyes." He tries to cut himself off from all enjoyment of the sense, all pleasures in the beauty of the created world, until in the

end, as is inevitable in so sensuous a nature, he cracks beneath the strain. The test comes when it is suggested that he should enter the Society of Jesus. He hesitates. Then he goes out for a walk on the shore and there the beauty of the scene and a sunset and a girl are too great for him. He knows that he cannot renounce the world, and he leaves the seminary. How this happened we do not discover, for Joyce is not very explicit about the machinery of his plot. In the final pages, however, we find him mixing with Dublin students, talking and arguing about philosophy and art and many other subjects.

I do not know how far the events of *Portrait of the Artist* are taken from Joyce's own experience, but there can be no doubt that Stephen Daedalus, as he appears at the end of the book, is very like Joyce. He was a man who had rejected Christian doctrine, but whose upbringing had so been steeped in Christian ways of thought that he was never able to throw them off. He was one whose nature was in part ascetic, or at any rate one who desired order and discipline in his life and was able to admire and sympathise with the ordered life of the monastery. And at the same time he was one with a passionate love of the created world and with a desire for freedom and the pleasures of the senses. These two sides of his nature were continually warring each with the other, so that his greatest work is both a piece of ordered construction and a flouting of all conventions, literary and otherwise. *Ulysses* was notorious as a book which the censor (whoever he may be) considered obscene. Let it be admitted from the first that there are phrases and sentences in the book—mostly blasphemies and curses—which most Christians would prefer omitted. It may be argued that it is better to bring such things into consciousness, to face and reject them, than to hoard them in the subconscious, but for my part they make me feel that my memory needs a gargle. The violence of this blasphemy was probably due to the struggle between the ascetic and the sensualist. But, apart from these passages, the tone of the book seems to be that of healthy, broad humour, not of smirking obscenity. I cannot agree with those who think Joyce was obsessed and fascinated by a disgust with the physical side of life. Once you have got over the dazzle which the virtuosity throws in your eyes, the chief impression that the book leaves on you is of fun, pure fun. *Ulysses*, for all its difficulty and complexity, is a great comic novel. It was as such

that Joyce saw it, and even the erudition and the loquacity are in the tradition of Rabelais and Sterne.

It is necessary, however, for the benefit of those who may not have read the book, to give a sketch of its plan. *Ulysses* tells the story of several characters during one day in Dublin, the 10th of June, 1904—strictly, from 8 a.m., 10th of June, to the early hours of the next day. It is designed as a parallel to the story of the *Odyssey*. The characters have their Homeric counterparts (e.g. Stephen Daedalus, now a little older, is Telemachus; Leopold Bloom is Ulysses), and the incidents are translations into modern life of the episodes of the *Odyssey*—the Sirens, for instance, become two barmaids giving an impromptu concert in a pub, and the descent into Hades becomes a visit to the cemetery at the funeral of Paddy Dignam. The shape of the story follows the three main sections of the *Odyssey*: first Telemachus-Stephen setting out to find his father, Ulysses-Bloom (a sort of spiritual father-and-sonship is presumed between Bloom and Stephen); then the wanderings of Bloom; and finally the return of Stephen and Bloom to Ithaca and Penelope (Mrs. Bloom). The adventures of Bloom do not always follow the same order as their counterparts in the *Odyssey*. Joyce tells nearly the whole of the story through the thoughts of his characters, and for each he has invented a personal rhythm. Stephen thinks in a rather wordy, involved, introspective manner, while Bloom has a staccato monologue, characteristic and very attractive. Each episode is told in a technique specially suited to its subject. At first this merely means variations on a fairly normal narrative style. In the chapter which takes place in the restaurant, a parallel of the episode of the Lestrygonians, the eaters of flesh, the technique is what Joyce calls “peristaltic.” The peristaltic organs are those concerned with the elimination of waste matter from the body, and this rather terrifying word merely means here that the narrative follows the thoughts of Bloom as they approach and turn away from the subject of food. Later when Joyce became more interested in verbal experiment (it should be remembered that the book took six or seven years to write) the technique took bolder and stranger shapes. The incident of the barmaids in the pub (the Sirens) is told in the form of a fugue with subject and answer, counter-subject, episode and stretto. It contains scores of verbal imitations of musical devices: a trill (“Her wavyavyeavyhcavyeyevyevy hair uncomb: 'd”);

modulation ("Yes, bronze from anear, by gold from afar, heard steel from anear, hoofs ring from afar, and heard steelhoofs ringhoof ringsteel"). And in the scene which takes place in the waiting-room of a maternity home, Joyce suggests embryonic development by a series of gorgeous parodies of styles from Malory to Carlyle in chronological order. In this latter case the virtuosity is too great for its purpose. The reader is able to enjoy to the full the parodies of Lamb ("That young figure of then is seen, precociously manly, walking on a nipping morning from the old house in Clambrassil street to the high school, his booksatchell on him bandolierwise, and in it a goodly hunk of wheaten loaf, a mother's thought"), and of Dickens ("All that surgical skill could do was done and the brave woman had manfully helped. She had. She had fought the good fight and now she was very very happy. Those who have passed on, who have gone before, are happy too as they gaze down and smile upon the touching scene"), but he completely forgets what the chapter is supposed to be about.

This plan alone is a tremendous task for the ingenuity of any writer, but Joyce is not yet satisfied. He allots to each chapter its own science or art and fills the prose with allusions to this, and draws much of his terminology and imagery from it. Whenever possible, this science or art is one which is appropriate both to the subject and the technique. In the episode of the barmaids already mentioned, where the technique is fugal, the science is music. The section is full of innumerable references to musical instruments, songs, operas and so on, and the air is full of singing and of noises musical and otherwise. Each chapter, too, has its particular symbol, the meaning of which seems to have remained with Joyce, and some are dominated by a particular colour, according to the significance of colour in Eastern mysticism. The symbols and colours need not worry us very much, but Joyce's final gesture is more important. He conceived the whole book in the form of the body of a man, and allotted an organ or a member to each episode. Here again connection with subject and technique is maintained whenever possible—in the barmaid scene (fugue—music) the organ is the ear; in the maternity hospital scene (embryonic development—medicine) it is the womb. To see the plan of the work in the image of the body of a man was very natural to one who had been a student of St. Thomas Aquinas. The Angelic Doctor is frequently mentioned in the pages of



*Ulysses*, and his system of thought lies behind the book almost as much as it does behind *The Divine Comedy*.

To the literary critic the sheer virtuosity of this is a delight, but the average reader invariably asks: Why did Joyce do it? To some extent he must have been attracted by the opportunity to exercise his own ingenuity. The very difficulty of the plan offered a challenge (like cross-word puzzles) which was a stimulus to his creative faculty. Moreover, something of the sort was necessary to make a book at all out of the "stream of consciousness." If we were to make a complete record of every thought which came into our minds during the course of a day the result might be interesting to a psycho-analyst and surprising to our friends, but it would not be a work of art. It would be long, involved, repetitive and boring. To make it into a work of art, it would be necessary to select and arrange or to impose some form upon it. Joyce chose to do the latter. It is of great importance to notice that the form was *imposed on* the material; it did not *arise from it*. Despite the immense and complicated system of dove-tailing, cross-references and the like, the form is not inherent in the subject matter, and the connection between Bloom and Ulysses is really fortuitous. I have heard that *Ulysses* was originally designed as a short story to be called "Mr. Bloom's Day in Dublin." Whether or not this is true I don't know, but it seems not unlikely that it would have been a greater artistic success in such a form. The vast pattern of *Ulysses* is an attempt to impose form and meaning on the complex material of modern civilisation. Faced with the same problem, Wells and Hemingway each in his own way had simplified Man, reduced him to one plane. Joyce had rejected such simplifications, but at the same time he had abandoned the doctrine which alone would have given coherence and purpose to life as he saw it. It is very significant that, though he no longer held the Catholic faith, it was to Catholic teaching which he turned to find a structure for his picture of life. A similar attempt to weld the diversity of modern life into a whole was made in *The Waste Land*. Eliot's attempt was more successful, partly because it was more concise, but partly also because he was already moving towards the complete acceptance of the Christian doctrines which were implicit in his thought.

The portrait of Bloom which occupied the centre of *Ulysses* is kindly and understanding. He is certainly not without his failings—in fact, few characters in fiction have had their failings revealed so frankly and fully. And though Joyce never sets up to be a moralist, it is always in the light of traditional Christian morality that Bloom's actions are seen. After fifty pages of the introspective Stephen (a rather tiresome young man—though it should be remembered that the “stream-of-consciousness” method tends to make the characters seem self-centred), Bloom comes as a welcome change:

“Mr. Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls. He liked thick giblet soup, nutty gizzards, a stuffed roast heart, liver slices fried with crust-crumbs, fried hencod's roes.”

There is a solid ordinariness about him which attracts us. His failings are those of the average man. He is lazy and self-indulgent, both in food and in sex—though his natural timidity makes him satisfy the latter largely through the eye and the imagination. He is proud in his small way, self-important, too anxious to save his face. At the same time his virtues are those of the average man. He is patient with his exasperating and unfaithful wife, he is kind to the cat, and at the end with some risk to himself he befriends Stephen when he is likely to lose his money and perhaps to be injured in a drunken brawl. Although in contrast to Stephen, Bloom is nothing of an intellectual, he is not without intelligence. He is continually following strange and ingenious trails of thought set up in his mind by everyday incidents or remarks. He is fascinated by numbers, and genuinely interested in music. And in the end we leave him with something very like affection to fall asleep and dream his wild and wandering dreams with “Sinbad the Sailor and Tinbad the Tailor and Jinbad the Jailer and Whinbad the Whaler and Ninbad the Nailer and Finbad the Failer and Binbad the Bailer and Pinbad the Pailer and Minbad the Mailer and Hinbad the Hailer and Rinbad the Railer and Dinbad the Kailer and Vinbad the Quailer and Linbad the Yailer and Xinbad the Phthailer.”

The later work of Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake*, seems to the ordinary reader to belong to philology rather than to literature and need not be considered here. Nor is this the place to study the great influence of his technical experiments—some of which had effect in a negative way, for Joyce carried certain types of writing to their farthest possible development and now nobody need trouble to write like that again. At present it is enough to say that Joyce reaffirms the traditional Christian view of the nature of Man: that Man is an imperfect and sinful creature who has being not only in the material world, but also in a world of transcendent values. And in doing so it was inevitable that he made a sort of restatement in fiction of the doctrine of Original Sin.

### *T. F. Powys*

It may seem strange to place T. F. Powys beside Joyce. He is, of course, of much lesser stature in literature and his aims and methods were very different. While Joyce attempted a gigantic work, Powys was most successful as a miniaturist; while Joyce elaborated, Powys simplified. These, however, are mere technical differences. A more serious incompatibility is that while Joyce was a leader of the younger generation, Powys appears to be the last of the Victorian tradition.

Powys belongs in the first case to the line of Housman and Hardy. Like them, he was a countryman—he even shared Hardy's topography, though the setting of his novels is not so much Dorset as a nightmare land halfway between Bedlam and Hell. All three were brought up in sternly-moral Christian households—both Housman and Powys being sons of country clergymen. All three as they grew up lost faith in Christian doctrine, but each retained his belief in Christian morality. Looking around them, they saw evil among men—cruelty, greed, selfishness, lust, fear. Hardy and Housman, as I have shown in the first chapter, blamed God. But Powys didn't. He blamed Man. In other words, he saw Man as an imperfect creature and he was aware of the reality of Original Sin. In this he agreed with Joyce, but my purpose in comparing the two is to show, not their agreement, but the way in which they differed within that agreement. Neither, of course, was a believing Christian; both were blasphemous; but while Joyce remained at heart a Catholic, Powys was an Evangelical. His

view of sin has nothing of the kindly tolerance we find in Joyce. He is obsessed with the total depravity of Man, and, as he has no hope of redemption, this obsession becomes frantic. In his earlier stories he was hag-ridden with horror at the sinfulness of Man. Book followed book in which he raged and screamed with loathing for mankind. No one since Swift has hated his fellow creatures more.

One of the earliest and most bitter of the novels is *Mr. Tasker's Gods*. Mr. Tasker's gods are pigs—and that conveys the attitude of the whole book. The characters are almost entirely horrible, mis-shapen creatures, monsters of bestiality, cruelty, lust and greed. The only glimpses of innocence in these books are seen in the village girls, and Powys can scarcely wait till they are sixteen before he sends them to drown themselves in the village pond. Ada asks what ways there are to put an end to a poor maid:

“‘I did tell Ada,’ replied Mr. Grunter, ‘that Dodderdown were the village for hanging, Madder the place to cut a wold throat, and that the folk of Folly Down do like drowning best.’”<sup>1</sup>

This shows another characteristic of Powys, his humour. For his novels, and more particularly his short stories, are not the gloomy reading which might have been expected. On the contrary, they are very entertaining, for Powys has protected himself against despair by his sardonic humour. This humour may make his work attractive in an undesirable way, by appealing to a sort of cynical sensuousness. Sometimes it is mild and gentle:

“The van moved slowly on its way, and at last reached Mumford. All the way to Mumford, Mat Trevis was thinking of Jimmy Tibbit. Jimmy had begun to get ready the home. He had bought a clothes-brush and a saucepan, and was saving up for a pair of bellows.”<sup>2</sup>

This is little more than a sort of cheerful leg-pulling, with enough irony to give it salt. But Powys' humour has usually more bite than this, and though it is expressed quite quietly it has the quality of getting in between the ribs. Indeed, I know of few

<sup>1</sup> *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* (Chatto and Windus).

<sup>2</sup> “The White Weathercock,” from *The House with the Echo* (Chatto and Windus).

writers who raise such annoyance and antipathy in those who do not respond to them:

"When Mr. Hall's wife died he married the Wotten Chapel.

"This chapel was as ugly as any building could very well be; so this change of wives was no gain to Mr. Hall, for his first lady had been a very pretty as well as a loving one.

"The chapel's front was shiny and spotted with blue, because it pretended to be marble. Its back and sides were white and red, being composed of those two coloured kinds of bricks. This second wife of Mr. Hall's was built by subscription, and as the debt upon her was only partly paid, Mr. Harris the builder never failed to attend the services to receive the collection. This money would be always handed to Mr. Harris—who collected it himself—after the service by Mr. Judah Gasser, the minister. The Rev. Gasser was a person of importance—he believed in the Devil. . . .

"Mr. Hall's new wife proved an expensive one. Those who came to her to hear about the Devil found the company cold, because the chapel was never heated except by the sermon, and after that the long extempore prayers always brought down the temperature.

"Lotty Hall was a little kittenish creature with a pink ribbon round her neck. She possessed little feet and unusually naughty toes, a great quantity of pale gold hair and a body as white and plumply rounded as a baby's.

"One winter's day Lotty was sitting near her father knitting for him, as a profound secret for Christmas morning, a waistcoat that he saw every day. Mr. Hall was looking out of the window at the chapel.

" 'I am going to warm up my dear wife,' he said suddenly.

" 'Are you, father?'

" 'Yes,' he replied. 'I am building a room under the chapel; a stove will be placed there that will send hot air up three gratings in the floor to warm our feet and legs.' ”<sup>1</sup>

While most people are amused at this banter and sarcasm, others find it unpalatable, largely because of the characteristic mixture of sexual and religious imagery.

This humour allows him to get across his most outrageous

<sup>1</sup> "The Devil," from *The House with the Echo* (Chatto and Windus).

conceptions. However he may snarl and gibe, we grin and bear it. But without the humour the bitterness is insufferable. In his humourless moments, not only is Man damned, but the farms stock only the fiercest bulls and the most bestial pigs, the fields are populated entirely by owls, rats, stoats, weasels, foxes and bats, and the hedges grow only nettles, docks, thorns and briars. This, of course, is sentimentalism, though in a weird form.

A characteristic of Powys' work, perhaps not unconnected with his evangelistic temperament, is his hatred of the clergy. Whenever a parson enters a Powys novel we may be sure that he will seduce the maid, rob the poor box or ill-treat the canary. This insistence on the depravity of the clergy would be ludicrous if the novels were intended to be realistic, but it is obvious that Powys uses the clergy as a convenient symbol for human frailty! Actually it works in a way. The clergy are still faintly associated in the popular mind with traditional morality, and one of the few ways in which a modern novelist can make his readers judge and condemn an evil action is to give it to a parson. Powys was the son of a country clergyman and this may explain his preoccupation with the clergy. Much of his landscape is like the view seen by a scared, imaginative child from the windows of a country rectory—the graveyard always near, the sexton among the worms, the robins on the path. Mrs. Vosper, too, reminds one of the sort of old woman who is terrifying to children.

In his later books Powys is more kindly. *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* is an allegorical fantasy in which God visits the earth in the form of a travelling wine-merchant accompanied by his assistant (the archangel), Michael. Mr. Weston is rather like a personification of Hardy's and Housman's conception of God—one who has created the universe and since lost touch with it. But unlike Hardy's "Immanent Will," Mr. Weston genuinely loves his creation and is grieved by the cruelty and suffering and sin which he sees among his creatures. He takes no ironic or malicious pleasure in the misfortunes of human beings. Nor is there any doubt that those misfortunes are, in the main, due to their own sins and folly. Of some of these follies—those which spring from warmth of heart—Mr. Weston is tolerant. He is tolerant, for instance, of the follies and sins which arise from love (here Powys departs for once from the Augustinian tradition which tends to regard sex as the primary sin). But for Mrs. Vosper, the horrible

type of all gossips and backbiters, there is only justice, and justice comes in the form of a lion which is kept in the back of Mr. Weston's van.

The people in the village of Folly Down are a mixed lot, but they are not so monstrous as those of the earlier novels. Mrs. Vosper is certainly as foul a person as can be found anywhere in modern literature, but some of the others have their better moments. There was "wold Grunter," to whom rumour had attributed all the illegitimate children—and there were many in the villages of Dodder, Maddar, Mockery Gap and Folly Down. Grunter, for all his reputation, is an aged man interested only in the end of the world, which he believes is at hand. He believes this because he had heard Luke Bird preaching to the geese about it. Luke Bird is a character of singular sweetness and innocence. "Luke wanted others to love him and be happy as he was happy." But the others would not listen; they are not ready to receive the gospel of love. And then there comes to Luke a strange and terrible idea:

"He remembered that at Dodder the only creatures who had looked at him with affection were the sheep, and the cows and the little singing birds. He remembered that once at Dodder, when he was eating his dinner out-of-doors, a robin had perched upon his shoulder, and had even eaten crumbs out of his hand.

"The creatures are kind and loving to one another," thought Luke; 'they are different from man.'

"Suddenly, as he sat there and looked out of his door, he felt convinced that it was the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air that God's Son came down to save. It was they and they alone who possessed souls. The certainty of this new belief filled Luke with hope. God had sent His only Son to be born in a stable, so that the most innocent and simple creatures, the oxen and the asses, should have the first chance of salvation."<sup>1</sup>

This, for all the quietness of its language, is one of the bitterest indictments of the human race since the last book of *Gulliver's Travels*. Besides Luke and Grunter and Mrs. Vosper there is also Bunce, the innkeeper, who blames God for everything that goes wrong in the villages—he is a sort of caricature of the Hardy-Housman attitude to God. And there is Tamar, a young girl,

<sup>1</sup> *Mr. Weston's Good Wine.*

who is in love with an angel. The angel was suggested to her imagination by the sign outside the village inn, but it is tempting to see in this a symbol of desire for the spirit. Probably Powys also had in mind the story of the fallen angels in the sixth chapter of Genesis, which in popular Jewish thought was regarded as the cause of Original Sin.

The inhabitants of Folly Down are not on the whole very attractive, and sometimes they are revolting. Yet Mr. Weston is genuinely sorry for them. There is little he can do for them, for most of their sorrows have been brought on by themselves, but what he can do he does. He gives them his good wine. The meaning of the symbol of wine may vary, but on the whole it means death and oblivion.

In *Unclay*, a later novel, Powys develops the same theme. Death comes into the book as a travelling scythesman. The characters are odder than usual even for Powys. There is, for instance, Mr. Solly, who sees all women as vegetables, and Joe Bridle's aunt, who thinks she is a camel. The book lacks the poetic grandeur of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, but it repeats that death is the only satisfaction in life.

In the pessimism of his outlook, Powys obviously resembles Hardy and Housman, and in his technique, too, belongs to the tradition of the nineteenth century. Yet he developed that technique until it fitted his purpose like a glove. He fashioned a spare prose style, removed every ornament or elaboration from the plot, and whittled down his characters till they are as simple as a drawing by Fougasse. *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* has all the qualities of a good thriller—suspense, mystery, surprises, and an exciting plot. Indeed, though at first Powys appears old-fashioned, he may have anticipated the work of Rex Warner and Graham Greene by his use of realistic fantasy.

His oddities, prejudices, blasphemy and bitterness make him a writer who must be read warily and praised only with reservations. But by his insistence on the sinfulness of human nature he showed himself more aware than most people of his time of the change which was beginning to take place in the general outlook of men.



## *The Satirists*

TO those who hold the traditional Christian conception of the nature of Man, Liberal Man and Natural Man are not only over-simplifications; they are pretensions, they are a case of Man putting on airs. Liberal Man certainly had much of the wind knocked out of him by Lawrence, Aldous Huxley and others, but Natural Man is a more difficult person to put in his place. Liberal Man is represented in popular thought by the Wellsian Utopia of aeroplanes and electricity. People may not recognise this for the fantasy which it really is, but at least they know that it belongs to the future. But Natural Man has been presented in popular fiction as a fantasy which is disguised as everyday life and which is accepted as such by many readers. Against this the obvious weapon is satire.

Not all satirists accept the Christian view of Man, of course. Many satirists write from the point of view of Liberal or of Natural Man, but they attack all that is sham or false, and, like Shaw and Montherlant, they follow their beliefs to the bitter end so far as they are able. Moreover, the very fact that satire is necessary implies that there has been a falling short, that things could be better, implies, therefore, that Man is imperfect. Now, it is impossible to conceive of imperfection without conceiving of perfection, if only dimly. All satirists, however much they may claim to be materialist and agnostic, have transcendental implications behind their thought.



The subtle fantasy of Natural Man in popular fiction demanded a subtle debunking. Among all the modern satirists who have written fiction, E. M. Forster is clearly supreme. It must not be thought that debunking is Forster's only or even chief purpose. He is a skilled novelist—perhaps the most skilled novelist now writing in English—with whom a delicate irony is the air in which his characters live and move. Indeed, his satire of the popular

fantasy is more by accident than by intention. Of his five novels, the first was published in 1902, the fourth in 1910, and the last in 1924. It is therefore only by an uncanny anticipation that his medicine was so salutary for the post-Lawrence generation.

Forster was a contemporary of Bennett and Wells, but his aims were very different from theirs. He was concerned not so much with the material world as with the surface of thought, the play and interplay of motive and response in conversation and action. For this the sturdy chronicle novel of the realists was quite unsuited, and had Forster been born later it is probable that he would have profited from the experiments of Mrs. Woolf and others and dispensed with plot. Certainly this would have fitted in with his own inclinations, for he found the labour of providing a plot distasteful and tiresome. Nevertheless, he did provide one, for the novel of the time demanded it, and the condescension with which he does so is a continual joy to the reader. Sometimes the plots are quite outrageous, as that of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, which includes the marriage of an English aristocratic widow to a penniless Italian, the kidnapping of a child by an English spinster, and the overturning of a carriage and the death of the child—all of which, except for the tragic ending, might have been found in Wodehouse. Even the more sedate plots are treated very disdainfully. Miss Quested in *A Passage to India* accuses a cultured Indian of assaulting her in some caves. After raising the English population to high excitement and the Indians almost to mutiny, she withdraws the charge without a word of explanation. In *The Longest Journey* a character is introduced at length in one chapter only to be killed off in the first sentence of the next. On the other hand the machinery of the opening of *Howards End* is unequalled for brilliance in any other modern novel. First there are three letters from Helen to her sister:

"DEAREST MEG,

"It isn't going to be what we expected. It is old and little, and altogether delightful—red brick."

The first letter rambles on very pleasantly, telling about the house and its inhabitants, and still more about the writer and the recipient. It is full of the most revealing touches, added so casually that the reader may miss them if he is not alert. The end of the first letter and the beginning of the second is a typical example:

" . . . There goes the breakfast gong. Much love. Modified love to Tibby. Love to Aunt Julie; how good of her to come and keep you company, but what a bore. Burn this. Will write again Thursday.

"HELEN."

~ ~ ~

"Howards End,  
"Friday.

"DEAREST MEG,  
"I am having a glorious time."<sup>1</sup>

And then, when everything is so pleasant and peaceful, comes the third letter:

"Howards End.  
"Sunday.

"DEAREST, DEAREST MEG,  
"I do not know what you will say: Paul and I are in love—the younger son who only came here Wednesday."

So Aunt Juley is packed off to Howards End to see what is really happening, and no sooner has she gone than there arrives a telegram for Margaret:

"All over. Wish I had never written. Tell no one.—HELEN."

The subsequent events are manipulated with the skill of a Restoration playwright: Aunt Juley mistakes the elder brother for Paul, and learns to her indignation that his family feels itself no more honoured by the proposed match than she does—the subtlety of it all cannot be conveyed by criticism. But after Forster has started his plot so ingeniously, he throws it aside in the most casual manner. Paul is not to be a character after all, and Meg, the elder sister, is going to marry Paul's father. A young clerk comes into the story, and his wife, who turns out to have been a former mistress of Meg's husband. All these characters are treated with kindness, but with shrewdness, too. Their motives, hypocrisies and self-deceptions are revealed with quiet irony. It is no good for any of them to try to weave a romantic daydream for his or herself—Forster would see through it at a glance.

<sup>1</sup> *Howards End.*

*Howards End* contains some wise and penetrating comment on the relations between people of different social classes, and *A Passage to India* has the same on Anglo-Indian problems. These I need not deal with here. But *The Longest Journey* applies (by anticipation) more directly to the myth of Natural Man. Its story is a satire on the cult of the primitive.<sup>1</sup> Rickie lives in a village on the Wiltshire Downs. He is sensitive and cultured. Also living in the village is Stephen, the opposite of Rickie,<sup>2</sup> the drunkard and a wastrel, yet a likeable rascal in many ways. Then Rickie learns that Stephen is his bastard half-brother. Now, Rickie's father and mother had separated, and he had lived with his mother. Towards his father he had felt bitter resentment and hatred, which he now turns upon Stephen as the heir of his father's baser qualities. Then Rickie discovers that Stephen is the son of his mother, not of his father. At once he begins to idolise Stephen, to see in him a personification of all the simple-hearted and primitive virtues. He tries to "reform" him, to save him from his follies. But it is no use, and in the end when he finds him lying drunk across the railway lines, he has to admit that Stephen is neither a monster nor a paragon, but only a human being.



The modern romantic fantasy has been perpetrated in its worst forms by women writers and indulged in by women readers. It is fitting, therefore, that women should be among those who have helped to clear the air. No one debunked the romantic hysterics of the late eighteenth century more effectively than Jane Austen, and some of her skill is shared to-day by Elizabeth Bowen. In *The House in Paris* she uses to a new purpose the device of telling the story by a flash back into the past. The main theme is of a woman in a house in Paris who tyrannises the life of her daughter and her daughter's fiancé until he is driven into a wild affair with an English girl. The beginning of the novel, however, is set eight or ten years later, and we are introduced first of all to the child who is the result of this affair and who is living a wretched life in the same house in Paris. Because we have given our sympathy to this

<sup>1</sup> It should be remembered that it was not Forster's deliberate intention that this should be so.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lawrence's symbolic dualism in *The Plumed Serpent*.

little boy, we judge the rest of the book differently from the way we should if we did not consider the result first.

*Death of the Heart* deals more particularly with the leisured and cultured class of the 1920's. A young girl of sixteen goes to live in London among a sophisticated and fashionable "set." By her innocence and candour, she exposes the pretences of the others. It is a very old and even hackneyed theme, but it is handled by Miss Bowen with great subtlety and delicacy.

Another novelist with a similar honest and critical vision is Desmond Hawkins, and I might mention James Hanley, whose work is in the realist tradition, but whose characters have a core of morality which gives them a roundness not shared by the characters of Galsworthy and Wells.

## *Franz Kafka*

THOSE writers of whom I have just written, Joyce, T. F. Powys and the satirists, certainly did much to teach Man not to put on airs. Each in his own way rejected the conception of man as a mere cog in society, conditioned entirely by his environment, and having responsibility for his actions only to his fellows. They did not, of course, deny that man *was* responsible to his fellows, nor that he had his part in society and his duty towards it, but they emphasised that the behaviour of the individual needed to be measured by more than the social yardstick. They also rejected the philosophical Coué-ism which saw man getting better and better every day, whether in the Wellsian shape of skyscrapers to come or in Lawrence's dream of the Noble Savage. They reasserted that Man was an imperfect and dependent creature, and in some ways rather a miserable, pathetic and even comic creature. This point of view is what T. E. Hulme called the religious as opposed to the humanist. It had been losing ground steadily since the seventeenth century or earlier and its return now may, if it becomes complete, be as great a change in thought as was that of the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. But the conception of man as sinful and imperfect is not the whole of religion, of course. In Christian terms it is the Old Testament without the New; the Fall without the Redemption. It is probably just because they could see only the tragedy of Man and had no hope of any salvation that Joyce became blasphemous and Powys bitter. The first great novelist of the modern age who expressed the full Christian conception of Man as a creature fallen by his own fault and redeemed by grace not his own was Franz Kafka. He did not, however, express it in accepted Christian terms or images. Indeed, it is as if with true humility he did not try to express anything at all, but went in search of truth and let the reader accompany him in that search. The assumptions behind Kafka's work are very simple and best expressed in two aphorisms quoted by Mr. Edwin Muir:

"That compared with the divine law, however unjust it may sometimes appear, all human effort, even at its highest, is in the wrong; and that at all times, whatever we may think, the demand of the divine law for unconditional reverence and unconditional obedience is beyond question."

The first of Kafka's novels to be translated into English did not appear until 1930. Since then he has been recognised by most critics as one of the truly original minds of this century, but as yet he is not widely known to the general reader. For this reason it may be as well to give some account of his work, and to illustrate these remarks by fairly generous quotations.

Franz Kafka was born in Prague in 1883, of middle-class, Jewish parents. He studied law and got a job in an insurance office. He developed tuberculosis, lived for some time in sanatoria in the Tyrol and the Carpathians, and then took lodgings in a village near Karlsbad. Afterwards he partly regained his health and went to live in a suburb of Berlin, but the difficult conditions which followed the war were too much for him and he died in 1925 in a sanatorium near Vienna. He left the manuscript of three unfinished novels to his friend, Dr. Max Brod, with orders for their destruction after his death. Dr. Brod has explained why he disobeyed those instructions, and everyone must feel that he was right to do so.

Two of the novels, *The Castle* and *The Trial* are religious allegories, dealing each with a different aspect of the Godhead, the one with divine grace, the other with divine justice.

*The Castle* starts superbly, evoking a strange landscape which is at once modern and timeless, and also belongs to the Gothic shadows of the imagination:

"It was late in the evening when K. arrived. The village was deep in snow. The Castle hill was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness, nor was there even a glimmer of light to show that a castle was there. On the wooden bridge leading from the main road to the village K. stood for a long time gazing into the illusory emptiness above him."<sup>1</sup>

From the first things go oddly. The inn cannot provide a room for him, but he is allowed to sleep "on a bag of straw in the

<sup>1</sup> *The Castle*, Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir (Martin Secker).

parlour." He has come to take up the position of Land Surveyor, and manages to get an acknowledgment from the Castle that they are expecting such a person. But that is the last favourable news from them for some time. Day after day he tries to get a permit to visit the Castle, or some clear recognition of his position, or instructions as to his work. But every time he is ignored or rebuffed. The official who is in charge of the department which deals with his case seems to be Klamm, a mysterious person of great power. He sends K. two assistants, two young men as irrepressible as the twins in *You Never can Tell*. They are always ready to help K., but their help consists in getting in his way and behaving like a pair of playful puppies. At last K. gets a letter telling him to report to the Superintendent of the village. The Superintendent is not very encouraging:

"... 'Really I must tell you the plain unvarnished truth of the matter. You've been taken on as Land Surveyor, as you say, but, unfortunately, we have no need of a Land Surveyor. There wouldn't be the least use for one here. The frontiers of our little state are marked out and all officially recorded. So what should we do with a Land Surveyor?' Though he had not given the matter a moment's thought before, K. was convinced now at the bottom of his heart that he had expected some such response as this. Exactly for that reason he was able to reply immediately: 'This is a great surprise for me. It throws all my calculations out. I can only hope there's been some misunderstanding.' 'No, unfortunately,' said the Superintendent, 'it's as I've said.' 'But how is that possible?' cried K. 'Surely I haven't made this endless journey just to be sent back again.' 'That's another question,' replied the Superintendent, 'which isn't for me to decide, but how this misunderstanding became possible, I can certainly explain that. In such a large governmental office as the Count's it may occasionally happen that one department orders this, another that; neither knows of the other, and though the supreme control is absolutely efficient, it comes by its nature too late, and so every now and then a trifling miscalculation arises. Of course that applies only to the pettiest little affairs, as for example your case. In great matters I've never known of any error yet, but even little affairs are often painful enough.' "

The Superintendent's confidence that the officials of the Castle



can never make a mistake is hardly communicated to K., especially when he learns the former history of his case.

This case had caused enormous complications until eventually the department concerned agreed that a Land Surveyor was not necessary. And now, to the Superintendent's regret, the whole thing seemed to be starting again.

In his attempts to make contact with Klamm, K. meets Frieda, a barmaid who had been Klamm's mistress. They fall in love and decide to live together, and throughout the rest of the book Frieda is always the surest guide (though still a very dubious one) in his attempts to get into touch with the authorities. For in this novel the women have a "connection with the Castle." What this connection may be neither K. nor the reader is ever really sure. (It may seem to some readers strange and even repellent that the symbol which Kafka chooses to represent this "connection" between the women and the Castle, i.e. Divine Guidance, should be physical intercourse. Within the framework of the allegory, however, this is quite comprehensible and artistically true.)

Now that K. is engaged to Frieda he is all the more anxious to get some real footing in the village, to have his position recognised, if only in part. The teacher offers him the temporary position of janitor in the village school until the question of his occupation is cleared up. He and Frieda would have to clean the school and carry coals and suchlike. For this they would receive no salary, but they would have their meals provided, and would be allowed to live in whichever of the two schoolrooms was not being used at the time. K. is persuaded by Frieda to accept the post, and the two of them go to the school, accompanied, as always, by the impish pair of assistants.

The chapters describing their life in school contain some of Kafka's most superbly comic writing. Given the situation, he works out all the results so logically that the reader takes it for granted and rarely realises that the events are sheer nonsensical farce:

"The new household was still without many necessities. The room had been heated, it was true, but it was a large one, sometimes used as the gymnasium—the gymnastic apparatus was standing about and hanging from the ceiling—and it had already used up all the supply of wood—it had been very warm and cosy

too, as K. was assured, but unfortunately had grown quite cold again. There was, however, a large supply of wood in a shed, but the shed was locked and the teacher had the key; he only allowed this wood to be used for heating the school during teaching hours. The room could have been endured if there had been beds where one might have taken refuge. But in that line there was nothing but one sack stuffed with straw, covered with praiseworthy tidiness by a woollen rug of Frieda's, but with no feather bed and only two rough stiff blankets, which hardly served to keep one warm. . . .

"Next morning nobody awoke until the school children were there, standing with gaping eyes round the sleepers. This was unpleasant, for on account of the intense heat,<sup>1</sup> which now towards morning had given way, however, to a coldness which could be felt, they had all taken off everything but their shirts, and just as they were beginning to put on their clothes, Gisa, the lady teacher, appeared at the door, a fair, tall, beautiful, but somewhat stiff young woman. She was evidently prepared for the new janitor, and seemed also to have been given her instructions by the teacher, for as soon as she appeared at the door she began: 'I can't put up with this. This is a fine state of affairs. You have permission to sleep in the classroom, but that's all; I am not obliged to teach in your bedroom. A janitor's family that loll in their beds far into the forenoon! Faugh!' Well, something might be said about that, particularly as far as the family and the beds were concerned, thought K., while with Frieda's help—the assistants were of no use, lying on the floor, they looked with amazement at the lady teacher and the children—he dragged across the parallel bars and the vaulting horse, threw the blanket over them, and so constructed a little room in which one could at least get on one's clothes protected from the children's gaze."

And so the novel continues, and K. makes effort after effort to make contact with the Castle and is always rebuffed. At this point Kafka left the book unfinished, but Dr. Brod says that at least a partial reconciliation was intended in the final (unwritten) chapters. The Land Surveyor was to die worn out by his struggle, and on his death-bed word was to come from the Castle saying that his claim to live in the village was not valid, but nevertheless

<sup>1</sup> In the meantime K. had obtained wood for the fire.

he would be allowed to live and work there. And so comes to an end this allegory of divine grace, which cannot be demanded nor sought nor bargained for on human terms, but must be accepted with humility when it is granted.

The influence of Kierkegaard can be seen in the Sortini episode, in which a girl is asked by an official of the Castle to do something which seems to her immoral and obscene. This episode is a parallel to the theme of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, which starts from the premise that what God required of Abraham was really a crime, the murder of his son.

The allegory of *The Castle*, despite its intellectual framework, is designed to appeal chiefly to the imagination. It is unfruitful to offer any specialised interpretation as being that intended by Kafka himself. Nevertheless, I hope that even in these brief extracts it will be clear that, however unintelligible and exasperating the actions of the authorities of the Castle may be, they are always in the end right. We see them entirely through the uncomprehending eyes of the human, K. Sometimes they seem aloof, like Klamms; sometimes incredible, even immoral, like Sortini; sometimes farcical, like the assistants; sometimes merely legendary, like the unnamed officials; but always, as K. gradually learns, they are completely and unequivocally right.

It is illuminating to compare *The Castle* with *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The allegory of the latter is by no means so simple as is often thought. It appeals in general on two main levels, which we may call parable and symbol. By parable I mean the introduction of abstract qualities in the form of characters (Ignorance, Faithful, Worldly-Wiseman) and the description of spiritual experiences in the form of incidents (Christian imprisoned by Giant Despair in Doubting Castle). This parabolic treatment, after the style of the old morality plays, is direct in its appeal, and has been the subject of innumerable Evangelical sermons. Sophisticated readers often try to ignore it, but, though it is not consistent,<sup>1</sup> it is subtler than is usually credited and it has a good deal of variety. Certainly it is not to be despised. By symbol I mean the whole conception in this book of the life of man as a journey and a struggle. This appeals more to the imagination than to the intellect. It is this

<sup>1</sup> As Macaulay pointed out, the river is an emblem of death and we are told that every human being must pass through it. But Faithful does not pass through it—he is martyred at Vanity Fair and goes straight to Heaven.

level of the allegory, conceived passionately by Bunyan and almost without his being aware of it, that makes the book moving and vital even to those who do not accept the Christian doctrine upon which the structure of the parable is built.

On the level of symbol, *The Castle* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* have much in common. Each deals with a journey, each presumes a goal, and each presents the life of man as a struggle in which it is necessary to make unceasing effort to reach that goal. But on the level of parable the books are very different. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian knows the road he must follow; he recognises, when he meets them, the dangers and discouragements and problems; his failures are due to fear, or faint-heartedness, sloth or folly. So much does the reader's interest depend on the way in which Christian follows the road and not in the mysteries of the road itself, that Bunyan was able to write a sequel in which Christiana, Christian's wife, goes along almost exactly the same route. The interest in this sequel is like that in snakes-and-ladders, where you wonder if the players will pass the trap at Square 66 or be sent back to Square 12. But in *The Castle* K. is completely ignorant of the way he should go and the moves he should make. Reports of friends, traditional stories and even apparent instructions from the Castle itself may all be deceptions. In the end K. cannot trust even his own reason. *The Castle* is the *Pilgrim's Progress* of a religious man without a dogma in a world of scepticism.



*The Trial* lacks the magnificence of *The Castle*, with its Gothic gloom and its strange questing, climbing movement, but it is a more varied book. And it has an end. This does not mean that it is finished, by any means, for a good deal of the final part was left unwritten, but Kafka did write the last chapter, and the reader can fill in the gap in his imagination. As I have said, the allegory of *The Pilgrim's Progress* appeals on two main levels—one, the symbolic, to the imagination, and the other, the parabolic, to the intellect. In the same way the allegory of *The Castle* is more symbolic and that of *The Trial* is more parabolic, though again the reader must be warned not to try to claim that his interpretation is the one and only interpretation, still less that it is that which Kafka intended. But while *The Trial* never reaches the poetic and dramatic heights of *The Castle*, its details are more tempting to the

ingenuity of the reader. In this novel, too, Kafka's humour is more intellectual and satirical, and less the pure fun of *The Castle*.

*The Trial* is again about K., this time called more precisely Joseph K. At the beginning of the novel K. is in bed waiting for the landlady to bring his breakfast, but instead of the landlady come two men to tell him that he is under arrest. The men are not at liberty to tell him why he has been arrested and he himself has not the least idea. He feels only that the whole thing is fantastic and must be a misunderstanding. The men eat his breakfast and try to steal some of his shirts, but eventually depart, saying that his arrest need not inconvenience him unduly, but that he must hold himself ready to report for interrogation when notified. The first interrogation comes on Sunday, at nine in the morning. Kafka has a convincing picture of K. arriving a little before the appointed time and then loitering about as if he did not care whether or not he was punctual. The Court is in a strange place—a sort of tenement house, crowded with children. At first K. cannot find the room where the Court is being held. But when he does he finds it crammed with strange people, those at the front old and with long beards. The Examining Magistrate is sitting at a table on a platform. K. climbs on the platform and forces himself, rather roughly, on to the magistrate's notice:

"But the Examining Magistrate did not seem to worry; he sat quite comfortably in his chair and after a few final words to the man behind him took up a small notebook, the only object lying on the table. It was like an ancient school exercise book, grown dog's-eared from much thumbing. 'Well, then,' said the Examining Magistrate, turning over the leaves and addressing K. with an air of authority, 'you are a house-painter?' 'No,' answered K., 'I'm the junior manager of a large Bank.'"<sup>1</sup>

This incident convinces K. of the absurdity of the proceedings. He begins to speak with growing indignation:

"'There can be no doubt,' said K. quite softly, for he was elated by the breathless attention of the meeting, in that stillness, a subdued hum was audible which was more exciting than the wildest applause, 'there can be no doubt that behind all the actions of this court of justice, that is to say, in my case, behind my

<sup>1</sup> *The Trial*, translated by Willa and Edwin Muir (Gollancz).

arrest and to-day's interrogation, there is a great organisation at work. An organisation which employs not only corrupt warders, stupid Inspectors, and Examining Magistrates of whom the best that can be said is that they recognise their own limitations, but also has at its disposal a judicial hierarchy of high, indeed of the highest rank, with an indispensable and numerous retinue of servants, clerks, police and other assistants, perhaps even hangmen—I do not shrink from that word. And the significance of this great organisation, gentlemen? It consists in this, that innocent persons are accused of guilt and senseless proceedings are put in motion against them, mostly without effect, it is true, as in my own case. But considering the senselessness of the whole, how is it possible for the higher ranks to prevent gross corruption in their agents? It is impossible, even the highest judge in this organisation will have to admit corruption in his court. So the warders try to steal the clothes off the bodies of the people they arrest, the Inspectors break into strange houses, and innocent men, instead of being fairly examined, are humiliated in the presence of public assemblies.' ”

But K. has protested too much. Though he would not admit it even to himself, he is conscious dimly of a feeling of guilt. Guilt for what? Guilt for nothing that he could remember to have done. Guilt, indeed, for nothing that he has done, but for what he is, for his selfness, for being K.

After this first outburst in the Court, K. begins to feel that he has not helped his cause along. He drops his defiance and tries to approach the Court. But in every step he is frustrated. He goes to the Interrogation Room and finds it empty. He turns to friends and gets no sympathy. At last an Uncle turns up, greatly distressed by the disgrace K. has brought upon the family, and introduces him to an Advocate. The Advocate is one of the most fascinating characters in the book. He is old and ill, and is neither very gracious nor very encouraging to his clients, whom he receives in bed. His servant, Leni, is of a different disposition. For her an Accused Man has an irresistible attraction, and she is ready to fling her favours at K., or, apparently, at any other of the Advocate's clients. In the character of the Advocate himself, K. indulges in his most gorgeously comic satire, and it is impossible to resist the temptation to see in him a Calvinist's view of the Catholic Church:

"After the Advocate thought he had humbled him sufficiently, he usually set himself to encourage him again. . . . He had started on K.'s case almost at once, of course, and the first plea was almost ready for presentation. That was very important, for the first impression made by the defence often determined the whole course of subsequent proceedings. Though, unfortunately, it was his duty to warn K., it sometimes happened that the first plea was not read by the Court at all. They simply filed it among other papers and pointed out that for the time being the observation and interrogation of the accused was more important than any formal petition. If the petitioner pressed them, they generally added that before the verdict was pronounced all the material accumulated, including, of course, every document relating to the case, the first plea as well, would be carefully examined. But unluckily even this was not quite true in most cases, and the first plea was often mislaid or lost altogether and, even if it were kept intact till the end, was hardly ever read; that was, of course, the Advocate admitted, merely a rumour. It was all very regrettable, but not wholly without justification: K. must remember that the proceedings were not public, they could certainly, if the Court considered it necessary, become public, but the Law did not prescribe that they must be made public. Naturally, therefore, the legal records of the case, and above all the actual charge-sheets, were inaccessible to the accused and his counsel, consequently one did not know in general or at least did not know with any precision, what charges to meet in the first plea; accordingly it could be only by pure chance that it contained really relevant matter. . . ."

K. met other people in his attempt to approach the Court. There was, for instance, the little Commercial Traveller, who had surreptitiously placed his case in the hands of six different Advocates, each unbeknown to the other, and who went about in fear and trembling lest any of them should find out. And there was the Painter. It was no surprise to K. to discover that the Painter lived in an attic at the top of steep stairs crowded with rude, untidy children; nor that you had to climb over the Painter's bed to get to the door; nor that the one skylight was never opened; nor that the Painter's work seemed to consist of innumerable studies of exactly the same landscape in exactly the same manner; nor that the attic was actually part of the Court and

that the children on the stairs were connected in some way with the Court officials. K. was not surprised, for by now he had begun to realise that the workings of the Court were beyond his understanding, and to feel that, however wild and irrational they might appear, they yet were aspects of an authority to which, in the end, he would have to submit. The Painter explains that there are three possible sorts of acquittal: "definitive acquittal, ostensible acquittal, and indefinite postponement." As for definitive acquittal—it may be a possibility, it exists as a legend, but no one has ever met with it in his experience. In the case of ostensible acquittal, the Accused goes ostensibly free. But:

"The documents remain as they were, except that . . . the whole dossier continues to circulate, as the regular official routine demands, passing on to the higher courts, being referred to the lower courts again, and thus swinging backwards and forwards with greater or smaller oscillations, longer or shorter delays. These peregrinations are incalculable. A detached observer might sometimes fancy that the whole case had been forgotten, the documents lost, the acquittal made absolute. No one really acquainted with the Court could think such a thing. No document is ever lost, the Court never forgets anything. One day—quite unexpectedly—some Judge will take up the documents and look at them attentively, recognise that in this case the charge is still valid, and order an immediate arrest. I have been speaking on the assumption that a long time elapses between the ostensible acquittal and the new arrest, that is possible and I have known of such cases, but it is just as possible for the acquitted man to go home from the Court and find officers already waiting to arrest him again. Then, of course, all his freedom is at an end.' 'And the case begins all over again?' asked K. almost incredulously. 'Certainly,' said the Painter. 'The case begins all over again, but again it is possible, just as before, to secure an ostensible acquittal.'"

The third possibility, indefinite postponement, "consists in preventing the case from ever getting farther than its first stages."

The novel now moves on to the magnificent scene in the cathedral. K. went there for a purpose that was prosaic enough—to show round an Italian delegate who was visiting the Bank. But the Italian did not turn up. K. went into the Cathedral. It



was dark and empty, yet there was a light above the pulpit to indicate that a sermon was to be preached. A priest entered the pulpit. The darkness, the silence, the strangeness of the place overawed K. and he turned to get out as quickly as he could:

"He had almost passed the last of the pews and was emerging into the open space between himself and the doorway when he heard the priest lifting up his voice. A resonant, well-trained voice. How it rolled through the expectant Cathedral! But it was no congregation the priest was addressing, the words were unambiguous and inescapable, he was calling out: Joseph K.!"

The priest, who reveals himself as the prison chaplain, comes down from the pulpit and talks to K. He explains that there is no way to be taken into the justice of the Court except by acceptance of the Court's demands and dictates, and he tells him the parable of the doorkeeper at the gate of the Lord and the man who wanted to enter.

Max Brod reveals that there is a gap in the manuscript at this point, and that Kafka had intended to describe further stages of the mysterious trial, but the last chapter remains. In this K. learns the final acceptance. He is taken by two warders of the Court to an old quarry on the outskirts of the town and there courteously and ceremoniously killed. The main allegorical significance of this is plain, but, as Edwin Muir has said, the genius of Kafka "lies in those turns of his imagination which are quite unpredictable and cannot be given allegorical meaning; in an obstinate strangeness which is the expression of his sense of the ambiguity of everything." Yet even this irrational, nightmare, almost surrealist element helps to add conviction to Kafka's study of the workings of conscience. No modern psychological novelist has done anything more essentially true to the workings of a conscience-ridden mind. One incident in particular illustrates this, one of the strangest and most moving in the book. Some time after his first interrogation, K. returns to his lodgings and finds that the two warders who arrested him in the first place are to be stripped and whipped in his rooms because he had complained of them in Court. He had never intended that. He explained that he wished them to have no punishment and he tries to bribe the whipper to let them go. But it is useless, and he goes away

miserable and disgusted. To me this is a graphic illustration of those acts which quite unintentionally bring down harm on others, and which, though we don't see how we could have known what would happen, nevertheless make us feel that we are to blame. But I don't want to press the point and I certainly don't want to suggest that this is what Kafka had in mind. The episode stands incredibly right in its context beyond need of interpretation or explanation.

While Kafka restates many things which had been largely forgotten during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (the necessity for humility and submission; the acceptance by faith of that which may seem illogical in the divine), it is evident that his conception of the Godhead is inadequate. It is too gloomy, too remote. By no means all people, Christian or pagan, feel that every movement they may make towards God is frustrated. There is also an undue weight of guilt and self-disparagement. Kafka seems to have gone through the experiences of self-disgust characteristic of the evangelical temperament, without ever reaching a conversion with its release. This feeling of guilt and failure can only be understood fully by reference to Kafka's personal experiences. Dr. Max Brod, in a section of a biography of Kafka printed in *Transition* (April, 1938), tells how young Franz "lived in the shadow of the powerful, large, broad-shouldered father, who, at the end of a long life that had been filled with work and much commercial success, but with cares and sickness as well, was able to leave to a numerous family, children and nephews, whom he ruled patriarchally, a many-storied apartment house in the centre of Prague." Kafka did not inherit his father's physical strength and powers of endurance, but took after his mother's family, who had been scholars and men of religion, dreamers with a touch of the eccentric. From his childhood Kafka realised that he could not live up to his father's expectations. He knew that there was a conflict between them, and this led, even when he was a boy, to a feeling of inferiority. In his diary of 1911 he writes:

"I allowed myself, out of sheer laziness, to go about in shabby clothes which my parents ordered from certain of their customers, the longest time from a tailor in Nusle. I was aware, of course, which was obvious also, that I went about especially badly

dressed, and I could detect when others were well dressed; only for years, I failed to discover the reason for my own wretched appearance in my clothes. Since, even at that time, I was already on the road to self-depreciation, more unconsciously than otherwise, I was convinced that clothes assumed the appearance of being stiff as a plank at first, then hanging in folds, only on me. . . . As a result, I patterned my behaviour, as well, to the old clothes. I walked with bent back, hunched shoulders, awkward arms and hands, and was afraid of mirrors, because they revealed to me an ugliness that, in my opinion, was unavoidable."

That Kafka realised how much the influence of his father had dominated his life is seen in the extraordinary letter which he wrote, but never actually delivered, to his father. It is the length of a short novel, and in it, he analyses the conflict between them. Addressing his father, he says:

"You had worked your way up through your own strength, consequently you had unlimited confidence in your opinion. . . . From your armchair you ruled over the rest of the world. Your opinion was right, every other opinion was crazy, 'meschugge,' exaggerated, abnormal. Your self-confidence, at the same time, was so great that you could not be consequential and yet you were still in the right."

Here we see the germ which led Kafka to emphasise those aspects of divine justice and grace which seemed illogical and even absurd. It was inevitable to his way of thought that the divine, not only should be beyond man's understanding, but should be exasperatingly so.

His feeling of inferiority and guilt, especially with regard to his family, is expressed most forcibly in the long-short story, "Metamorphosis."

This is about a man who suddenly and unaccountably turns into an insect, evidently a kind of huge cockroach. It is told from the point of view of Gregor, the man, and is very moving, even painful, reading. The opening paragraphs in which the reader gradually begins to understand what has happened have a fantastic terror about them unequalled in modern literature. And the passage in which Gregor tries to explain things to the

head clerk of the office, and the incident which follows are almost unbearable in their poignancy and horror. From the very beginning what matters about the change to Gregor is its effect on his family. It is not so much the physical calamity of Gregor's being an insect which troubles the reader, but his terrible inability to make his family understand what he means. The figure of the father driving his son before him in what is to him the only possible way is like a gargoyle pushing its head out of the shadows of Kafka's memory.

"Unfortunately, this flight seemed finally to bewilder the father who until now had been entirely self-possessed. For instead of running after the head-clerk himself, or at least not impeding Gregor in his pursuit, he grasped in his right hand the cane which the head-clerk had left with his hat and overcoat on an armchair and in his left picked up a big newspaper from the table. Then, stamping his feet, he started to drive Gregor back into his room by waving the cane and newspaper at him. Gregor's pleas were to no avail; they were not even understood. Try as he might to turn his head humbly, at each attempt the father only stamped his feet. Across the room his mother, in spite of the cold weather, had opened a window, and, leaning far out, had buried her face in her hands. . . . Pitilessly his father drove him on, all the while continuing to make hissing noises like a wild man. But Gregor was not accustomed to walking backwards. It was a very slow procedure. If he had only been allowed to turn round he would have reached his room quickly. But he was afraid of making his father impatient by a time-consuming about-face, for every moment, deadly blows on his back or head threatened him from the cane in his father's hand. . . . When at last he succeeded in getting his head in front of the doorway, it turned out that his body was too large to pass through the opening. Of course, his father, in his present state of mind, never thought of opening the other half of the door to make a wide enough aperture for Gregor to pass through. His one and only idea was to get Gregor back into his room as quickly as possible. He could never have borne with the complicated manoeuvres which Gregor would have had to undertake in order to get up on his little rear legs and perhaps sidle through the door in that fashion. . . . The noise now no longer sounded behind Gregor like the voice of his father alone—it was

no longer a joke—and Gregor squeezed himself, come what might, by main force into the doorway. One side of his body swung up in the air and there he lay tilted in the opening. His flank was sore from having scraped over the jamb, ugly stains marked on the white door. Soon he was stuck fast, and would not have been able to budge without assistance. His little legs on one side hung trembling in mid air, those on the other side were painfully squeezed against the floor. Then, suddenly, from behind, his father gave him a strong push which released him, and he landed with a plop, bleeding profusely, in the middle of his own room. The door was pushed to with the cane; then everything was quiet at last.”<sup>1</sup>

In his third novel, *America*, Kafka escapes for a time from the influence of his father. It is a strange book, less allegorical than the other two, and much lighter and happier in tone. It is the story of a boy who, for a forgivable fault, was packed off to America. Kafka had never been farther from home than Italy, and his America is a dream country built up from travel books, guide books, shipping advertisements and so on. When the boy, Karl, lands in America he is adopted and pampered by a rich uncle, who then casts him off. He gets work as a lift-boy in a large hotel, where he lives among farcical conditions. Next he falls into the hands of two men who are living partly as consorts, partly as servants, with an incredibly fat opera singer. The passages describing Karl's subjection to these three in their flat have a nightmare quality, comic and yet at the same time evil, like the nastier type of comic postcard. In the end Karl joins the Oklahoma Nature Theatre, which “welcomes everyone,” and here among girls dressed as angels and women blowing trumpets, he finds a job and a chance to realise his ambition of becoming an engineer. On the notice board of the racecourse where the Theatre is holding its meeting, he sees displayed the false name he had given: “Negro, Technical worker.” The boy's adventures take place among real ships, and hotels and lifts and buffets, which do not pretend to be anything but themselves, or to have any symbolism lurking behind them. But for all that, the book is pure fantasy. In its farcical comedy it reminds you often of Charlie Chaplin, and again in the moments of pathos. It might not be

<sup>1</sup> “Metamorphosis,” quoted from *Transition*.

inappropriate to compare parts of it with the slapstick passages in some of the films of Preston Sturges (notably *Sullivan's Travels*), though it is much more delicate and subtle and slower in movement. The allegory of *The Castle* and *The Trial* demanded a grandeur of imagination and intellect which is beyond most writers, so that it is possible that *America* may turn out to be the most fruitful influence on the novel of the future.

For the purpose of this study, however, it is more important to notice that the book is a picture of innocence. Karl, aged sixteen, is an attractive boy, of pure, natural unpriggish innocence. In America he meets various unattractive and even odious people, but he passes unspoiled through his experiences with all of them.

Karl is a very likeable figure of youthful innocence, trailing rather comic clouds of glory. But it does not seem fair to Kafka to describe his creation, as Mr. Muir does, as "Unfallen, though his life is spent among fallen creatures." There is no need to accuse Kafka of an unreal and heretical conception—Karl is human enough. For one thing he is not faultless. In the opening sentence we learn that he was "A poor boy of sixteen who had been packed off to America by his parents because a servant girl had seduced him and got herself with child by him." That certainly does not sound very blameworthy, but it shows that Karl's genealogy included Adam. Even the very light shadow that this may leave on the story is made lighter when, towards the end of the first chapter, we learn that the servant was "a person of round about 35."

It is impossible to quote from *America*. Its fun, its pictures of fantastic degradation, the sheer delight of its illogical logic, all these have to be met and enjoyed in their own country, which, while you are in it, is as real as any continent on the other side of the Atlantic—or more real. In its optimism it provides a necessary complement to the heavy feeling of guilt in much of the rest of Kafka's work. Dr. Brod says that in the last chapter, a sort of child's dream of Utopia, Karl was to be re-united to his parents. That chapter was never written, but if it had been Kafka might have solved, at any rate in imagination, the problem of his relationship to his father.

Taken together, these three novels of Kafka's show a more dignified, because a truer, picture of the human situation, of the position of Man in relation to God and death and judgment, than is to be found anywhere else in modern fiction.

## *After Kafka*

BEFORE considering Kafka's influence on English writers, it may be as well to notice a short story, "The Gentleman from San Francisco," by a modern Russian, I. A. Bunin. This can be read in a translation by D. H. Lawrence and S. S. Koteliensky in the *Penguin Book of Russian Short Stories*. It is worth remarking how in this story, as in *America*, the New World has become a symbol which may vary in its significance. It looks as if the cosmopolitan and polyglot civilisation of North America is beginning to haunt the imagination of the people of Europe at a time of turmoil and transition much as the then uncivilised continent fascinated the men of the Renaissance.

"The Gentleman from San Francisco" is really a very simple story, for all its wealth of circumstantial detail. It tells of a rich American who is spending the winter cruising in the Mediterranean with his wife and daughter. They enjoy every luxury, food, clothes, service, entertainment. The whole ship is organised for their pleasure and comfort. And on shore the hotels cater for them in the same way. Their world seems absolutely secure. Then suddenly the Gentleman from San Francisco is taken ill and dies. The rest of the people try to ignore the matter, but they are uneasy in their hearts, and the body of the man from San Francisco returns to America in "the same renowned vessel which so short a time ago, and with such honour, had borne him living to the Old World. But now he was to be hidden from the knowledge of the voyagers. Closed in a tar-coated coffin, he was lowered deep into the vessel's dark hold."

If *The Castle* is a modern *Pilgrim's Progress*, "The Gentleman from San Francisco" is a modern morality; a *Dance of Death* in one scene only. Its message is the old one of the vanity of human wishes, and the transience of the pleasures and treasures of the world, and it is all the more effective for its use of strictly contemporary imagery.

*The Plays of W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood*

In England the first direct influence of Kafka was seen probably in the plays of Auden and Isherwood. We may presume that they were acquainted with *America* before the English translation was published in 1938, and *The Dog Beneath the Skin* has much the same fantastic scheme as the novel, though the comedy is more satirical and the significance almost entirely political.

In *The Ascent of F6*, their second play, they made a much more interesting synthesis of Kafka's allegory and the modern poetic drama, which was then receiving impetus from the success of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. (The use of the device of the four Tempters in Mr. Eliot's play, though obviously derived from the moralities and not from Kafka, was helpful in getting English audiences used to allegory on the stage.) The play tells of the efforts of a party of men, and, in particular, their leader, Ransome, to climb a mountain which is clearly Everest, in spite of its being in Africa! It has a fairly obvious political interpretation, but in the second half of the play this becomes subordinated to the story of the ghost who haunts the mountain—a ghost who eventually turns out to be the mother of Ransome. Auden and Isherwood are not nearly so successful in their Freudian fantasy as was Kafka in his illogical twists. For one thing, they are not satisfied merely to present the dream, but feel that they must set about to explain it, in spite of the fact that they themselves are not very clear what it means. This part of the play sounds like a mixture of the patient's dreams and the psycho-analyst's comments on them. The play had a run of over a hundred performances, from which we can be sure that something in it did evoke a response in the audience. It had, of course, considerable dramatic effectiveness. A good many of the scenes were exciting, especially those in which one member of the party after another disappears as they climb higher up the mountain, and there was a happy and amusing device by which the reactions of the people at home were shown in Mr. and Mrs. A., who listen to a wireless account of the expedition and express themselves in the witty, music-hall verse which was characteristic of Auden at this period. But the real success of the play lay deeper than that. In dealing with the climbing of a mountain, the authors chose a central symbol which would appeal to



every member of the audience and which each could interpret in his own way. Indeed, many could enjoy and appreciate it without being conscious that they were interpreting it at all. Those who were puzzled or irritated by the dragon and the game of chess and the veiled horror which was revealed as Ransome's mother, were moved by the simple image of the mountain and the climbers. Memories of Everest stories stirred in their minds, of holidays in the Lake District, of school mottoes and of "Excelsior."<sup>1</sup> The symbol was greater than the play, and despite all the attempts to scuttle and capsize it, Auden and Isherwood realised this as poets, and gave the symbol the imaginative force to which the audience responded.

Their next play, *On the Frontier*, was a disappointment, and the war put an end to further dramatic experiments of this kind. Eliot, too, in *The Family Reunion* did not add much to the technical development of the poetic drama—or not, at any rate, along these lines. So that to see the further growth of allegory in England since the beginning of the war we must turn to poetry and fiction. Poetry I will leave to a later chapter. In fiction the most direct disciple of Kafka is Rex Warner.

### *Rex Warner*

Warner's earlier novel, *The Wild Goose Chase*, was an anti-fascist fairy-tale. His next, *The Aerodrome*, touches deeper issues and is, to my mind, one of the outstanding works of fiction to be published since the beginning of the war. It tells of a village. Not a very pretty village. The people are not so hag-ridden with sin as the inhabitants of Dodder, Madder and the rest of Mr. T. F. Powys' locality, but it is clear that human nature is far from perfect in this village, and that good and evil are inextricably mixed in its society. Cruelty is not unknown, for the rat-catcher bites off the heads of the rats to amuse the children, and the sexual behaviour of the people is such that a man needs to make careful inquiries into the ancestry of his betrothed before he can be sure that their marriage will not also be incest. Near the village is built the aerodrome, which is apparently the perfect totalitarian machine

<sup>1</sup> In a programme on the wireless, which was I think arranged by Auden (or, at any rate, the idea was suggested by his programme, "Up the Garden Path"), Longfellow's "Excelsior" was recited with wild exaggeration by grotesque voices accompanied with comic noises off, and through it all the central symbol of the poem rang clear as a bell.

for organising human life. Over it rules the Air Vice-Marshal, the fascist dictator, a man of ideals and firm purpose, to attain which he is ready to subdue all human feelings and desires. The aerodrome is a seemingly faultless machine, but it is only a machine and in the end we turn with relief to the village, however imperfect and unsatisfactory it may be. *The Aerodrome* is clearly a political parable for the times, but it is also a religious book, a commentary on the nature of the human soul.

### *Graham Greene*

It is interesting to turn next to Graham Greene, the finest novelist of the Auden generation. The influence of Kafka is not directly seen in his work—indeed, the dominant influence is that of Dostoevsky. Greene takes the gangster thriller as Dostoevsky took the nineteenth-century mystery story, and makes of it a novel which exists on three planes: that of plot, that of characterisation and psychology, and that of metaphysics.

Yet with Kafka in mind we can see that his novels are unintentional allegories. The theme of many of them is the hunted man—the gangster or the political assassin hunted by the police, the priest hunted by the communists. But behind this is a greater hunt, the hunt of the Hound of Heaven. “God gets His man” might be the title of a good many of Greene’s novels.

Greene is a Catholic, and this gives his characters a moral framework in which to live. Their actions matter. The reader is aware that behind the choices and gestures of the characters are the forces of good and evil. Wrongdoing is sin; it is not just a matter of unhappiness, but of damnation. Often the characters themselves are aware of this. *Brighton Rock* tells of a seventeen-year-old boy who is the leader of a gang which terrorised bookmakers and extracted a “protection” levy from them. He murders a member of a rival gang, and then marries Rose, a little waitress, so that she will not have to give evidence against him. Both Pinkie (the Boy) and Rose are Catholics. They are aware of what they are doing; they commit mortal sin with the knowledge of its consequences. Against them is put the character of Ida, a jovial personification of Natural Man, believing in nothing and having no qualms about anything. “*Credo in unum Satanum*,” says Pinkie—and in Greene’s novels the awareness of evil often seems stronger

than that of good. But Greene is no Calvinist: he believes that human nature was created good, and though it may have been wounded and warped by sin beyond all human repair, it may still be redeemed by grace. At the end of *Brighton Rock* the boy leaps over a cliff when the police are after him, but the girl remains to confess and seek absolution. And the priest tells her that the love she had for the boy, however debased it may have been, may yet be a means of grace to her and perhaps to his soul. In *England Made Me*, Anthony Farrant, with the Harrow tie to which he had no right, is a waster and a woman-chaser, but he loves his sister Kate. The love is incestuous in wish if not in act, but it is still the best point in his character.

In *The Power and the Glory* redemption is more certain. During the anti-clerical persecution in Mexico a Catholic priest lived in hiding in the jungle, going from village to village to say Mass and give the sacrament to the faithful among the natives. Yet he was himself very far from being a hero. He was a drunkard, a liar, a coward, and a lecherer. He had a mistress and a child. He had disgraced his calling and failed his flock many times and in many ways, yet there was a determination about him which never let him give in. The means of grace are sometimes strange and apparently precarious. Greene tells how the priest schemed and lied and risked discovery and death to get the wine without which he was useless among men. Then when he gets it, circumstances and his own cowardice ordain that the wine shall be drunk by a band of bawdy officials. There is a very moving scene in which the priest watches the wine which he can turn into the blood of God steadily disappear from the bottle. All the time the hunt for him goes on until at last he finds a new courage and is able to face death without wincing. *The Power and the Glory* is a strange book, with all the speed and excitement of a thriller, and with the evocative power of a dramatic poem.

In all his novels—the thrillers (“entertainments,” he calls them) as well as the more serious work—Greene views the modern world with a mind fastidiously Christian. He is horrified by our mass-produced civilisation of shoddy morals, handy gadgets, cheap contraception and ready-made pleasure. Except in *The Power and the Glory*, the scene of his novels is persistently that of a spiritual second-hand shop. The glass-and-steel offices of Krogh, the Stockholm financier, are as shabby as the attics and bed-sitting

rooms of *It's a Battlefield*. Shabbiest of all, perhaps, is the semi-suburbia of *Brighton Rock*, where a girl driving between bungalows on an arterial road is sure she is in the country because she has seen a hen.

Greene came from the generation which produced *New Writing*. This publication, under the editorship of John Lehmann, had encouraged a serviceable prose, undecorated and direct, which was intended for "objective reporting," and was admirable for Greene's purpose. Some writers—V. S. Pritchett being among the best—developed written dialogue till it was terse and natural, completely "in character" with the speakers, and yet very revealing about the thoughts and assumptions behind the spoken words. Greene is particularly adept at this, and over it all throws a shade of irony or disapproval which never intrudes or twists words, and yet is clearly felt:

"'But physically aren't I a bit attractive to you?'"

"'You don't know what you are talking about,' Anthony said.

"'Oh,' she said, 'I don't pretend to have had all your experience. A girl in every port and any port in a storm.'

"'I don't believe you've ever had a man,' Anthony said. 'I believe you're a virgin.'

"'She slapped his face hard.

"'I'm sorry,' Anthony said. He was hurt and angry.

"'It was a beastly thing to say.'

"'I'm sorry—I said I was sorry.'"<sup>1</sup>

"It was a beastly thing to say"—Greene is thoroughly aware of the irony of this, yet he does not manipulate his people in order to produce it. The conversation is quite consistent with the characters of the man and woman and with their outlook.

There is, however, a certain monotony and limitation of view about Greene's books. His landscape is too unchangingly a nightmare world where the furniture is of everyday things, taxis, umbrellas, tins of condensed milk. Particularly in his thrillers he reminds one of Hitchcock's films. Terror lies behind ordinary objects, and commonplace settings are made bizarre by the inapposite events which take place in them—compare, for instance, the fight in the mission-room while the organ plays in

<sup>1</sup> *England Made Me* (Heinemann).

*The Man Who Knew too Much*, with the man-hunt in the A.R.P. practice at the end of *A Gun for Sale*. We feel that for Greene to have full scope for his poetic imagination he must broaden his landscape and increase its depth. In *The Power and the Glory* he shows signs that he is going to do this, and his future work still holds exciting potentialities.

## *Modern Poetry*

THE poetry of the last forty or fifty years does not fall so easily into three "periods" as does the prose. Actually there was very little verse which could be considered the equivalent of the work of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy in prose. This does not mean that "realism" is incompatible with poetry, but that the documentary aims of those writers could be achieved better in prose. Masfield attempted to write realist stories in verse, such as "The Everlasting Mercy," "The Daffodil Fields" and "Dauber." The enthusiasm with which the first was received in 1911 shows how its intentions suited the time, but it is noticeable that it has been ignored very largely by later poets of every school. Probably the best documentary effects have been achieved *en passant* by such writers as Eliot who had another end in view.

The best poems of the realist period were quiet descriptions of Nature, like those of Edward Thomas, or plain factual poems given life by some passionate personal experience, like those of Siegfried Sassoon. The heart of the matter is that materialism and poetry do not agree. This does not mean that a man who holds or at any rate professes a materialist view of life cannot be a poet. There have been many such, but we feel that their materialism is of the head only. Unconsciously, perhaps even against their will, they believe that man's life is more than a matter of chemistry, physics, biology and so on—otherwise they would not be poets. Poetry, like satire, has transcendental implications.

### *Walter de la Mare*

It is not surprising, therefore, that many poets of the realist period tried to create a spiritual world or a dream world. Such a poet is Walter de la Mare. De la Mare puts forward a world of dream which to him is quite as real as the world of matter. He does not deny the existence of the latter, and above all he does not pretend that his world of dream is the world of matter. There is no falsification about his poetry. He is one who, as he says of a child, steps—

"Out of a dream of Wake  
Into a dream of Sleep."<sup>1</sup>

His poems are about the dream of wake. Sometimes they are not unlike the dreams of the romantics, especially Coleridge and de Quincey—dreams built of symbolism drawn from literature and legend. In such a dream is found the country of Arabia:

"Sweet is the music of Arabia  
In my heart, when out of dreams  
I still in the thin clear mirk of dawn  
Descry her gliding streams;  
Hear her strange lutes on the green banks  
Ring loud with the grief and delight  
Of the dim-silked, dark-haired Musicians  
In the brooding silence of night."

More often he turns, not to literature, but to the everyday world as seen through the eyes of a child. It is a world which is not so everyday that you may not come across fairies and witches in it, but they are the sort of fairies and witches which are easily associated with quite ordinary chairs and broomsticks. Best of all is his childhood vision of the commonplace, and this is his own peculiar contribution to literature:

"With glass like a bull's-eye  
And shutters of green,  
Down on the cobbles  
Lives Mrs. MacQueen."<sup>2</sup>

Or:

"Old Ben Bailey  
He's been and done  
For a small brown bunny  
With his long gun."<sup>3</sup>

### *The '90s*

A more deliberate challenge to materialism was to be found in the Symbolist Movement. The basis of the movement was

<sup>1</sup> "Hide and Seek," from *Peacock Pie* (Faber and Faber).

<sup>2</sup> "Mrs. MacQueen" (or the Lollie-Shop), from *Peacock Pie*.

<sup>3</sup> From *Bells and Grass* (Faber and Faber).

æsthetic rather than philosophic, but it was a reaction to the nineteenth-century view of life as well as to nineteenth-century ugliness. In England it showed itself first during the '90's in the poetry of Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Oscar Wilde and others. The movement in the '90's was eccentric and even unhealthy (or, as it was called, decadent), yet it had in it a germ which was to be of great importance in the development of modern poetry. Undoubtedly there was a good deal of affectation about it. There was, for instance, the French novel which told how a man in his attempt to seek new pleasures gave a banquet in a hall where all the hangings, curtains, furniture and even table linen were black, and black food (caviare, lager) was served by Negresses dressed in black satin.<sup>1</sup> In England the popular colour was yellow—yellow chrysanthemums, yellow sofas, *The Yellow Book*. Despite its odd form, this was partly high spirits, the desire of youth to shock or bewilder its elders, but it was partly neurotic too, as is shown by the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley.

In all this there is a foreshadowing of surrealism and the cult of the irrational which was to be a marked characteristic of the revolt against Liberal Man. The '90s also rejected the nineteenth-century belief in the natural goodness of Man. It became possible to believe in sin again. Sin became a fashionable topic, and, as a natural result, innocence also. There was a queer mixture of cynicism and remorse. The poets were like debauchees, the morning after the night before, standing penitently in a row, while innocent young maidens clad in white walked past them carrying lilies in their hands. Quite a number were so penitent that they were received into the Roman Catholic Church.

### W. B. Yeats

The '90's passed away, however, and left little mark on the poets of the early twentieth century except for Yeats. Their main importance in literature is that they introduced into England a technique of writing—Symbolism. Briefly this may be described as the art of evoking an emotional response in the reader by means of

<sup>1</sup> See *The Eighteen-Nineties*, by Holbrooke Jackson. It should be remembered that these remarks apply only to those who were associated with the particular æsthetic movement of the '90's and not to many other writers from Hardy to Shaw who were contemporary.



symbols instead of by direct statement. A poet feels lonely. He does not describe his loneliness or explain it; instead there comes into his mind the image of a thorn tree on a barren moor. He describes the tree hoping that this will arouse in the reader a corresponding mood of loneliness. The example is grotesque, but it illustrates the underlying principles. The image is a brick wall against which the writer bounces his thoughts like a rubber ball and hopes that the reader will catch them. Take away from the writer as well as the reader the conscious knowledge of what the symbol means, let there be no rational connection between the image and the writer's thoughts, and you then have surrealism.

It is a method which can be modified in limitless ways. It can be suited to almost any beliefs and does not pre-suppose any particular philosophic outlook. Nevertheless, it does tend to restore some of the complexity to life which was missing in the simplified views of Liberal and Natural Man. This is particularly noticeable when the method is applied to fiction, as in the novels of Virginia Woolf. Mrs. Woolf had not the creative power to make her characters as convincing as Mr. Polly or Jake, but the complicated pattern of their experience, a mixture of sense impressions, reasoning, memory, habit, and so on, is more like that of everyday experience than the over-simplified lives of the heroes of Wells and Hemingway.

Yeats made for himself a private mythology, taken partly from Irish legend and partly from his own imagination. To this he added later a set of figures such as Pearse and Connolly, taken from the incidents of the Irish Revolution and the Irish nationalist movement. On this mythology he built some of the finest poetry of our time, but there is one great danger about such a practice: Where the mythology is not bound together by an intellectual scheme the symbols may become more real to the poet than the real world. If this happens the poet begins to become too subjective, and to fear that everything may be an illusion but his own ego. Yeats was aware of this himself:

“O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Among School Children,” from *The Tower* (Macmillan).

In what looks like an attempt to find an intellectual scheme he experimented in many forms of the occult, from spiritualism to Eastern mysticism, but always we feel that he accepted such teaching only in part, and regarded it at most as a set of symbols for that which could not be fully understood by the human reason. It is not possible to find a consistent dogma in the poetry of Yeats, but in the later work there seems to be an approximation to the point of view of Lawrence—a belief in race, and blood, and in a sort of folk-mind or folk-soul:

“Many times man lives and dies  
Between his two eternities,  
That of race and that of soul,  
And ancient Ireland knew it all.”<sup>1</sup>

This implies a reincarnation in some form or another, as it did in Lawrence, though he was rather chary about saying so. Yeats, too, seems to avoid expressing it in the terms of Rider Haggard’s *She*, but the belief is there all the same:

“Though grave-diggers’ toil be long,  
Sharp their spades, their muscles strong,  
They but thrust their buried men  
~~Back in the human mind again.~~”<sup>2</sup>

Later in the same poem we have a passage the context of which reminds us even more of Lawrence:

“You that Michael’s prayer have heard,  
‘Send war in our time, O Lord,’  
Know that when all words are said  
And a man is fighting mad,  
Something drops from eyes long blind,  
He completes his partial mind,  
For an instant stands at ease,  
Laughs aloud, his heart at peace.”

The curious pride of these lines is typical of Yeats alone, but the intuitive belief in violence and in the sort of passion which comes

<sup>1</sup> “Under Ben Bulbin,” from *Last Poems* (Macmillan).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

with violence is very like Lawrence's belief in his *démon*. The interest in the occult, too, is another form of the cult of the irrational which we found to be characteristic of Natural Man. Yeats rejected the idea of scientific progress from the first, and as he grew older he became more and more disillusioned about society until his final view of civilisation had the same fascist tendencies as that of Lawrence or Montherlant.

This was probably due to his rage at growing old. He was certainly not afraid of death, nor did he worry about the passed years of youth, but he felt old age a drag upon him:

"Decrepit age that has been tied to me  
As to a dog's tail."

With his imagination still on fire, he hated the restrictions put on him by failing health, and he was afraid, too, that his poetic talent would desert him—though it never did:

"Never had I more  
Excited, passionate, fantastical  
Imagination, nor an ear and eye  
That more expected the impossible—"

And he felt he would have to leave the rich store of symbols which he had built up for himself, and live in the dry intellect

"It seems that I must bid the Muse go pack,  
Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend  
Until imagination, ear and eye,  
Can be content with argument and deal  
In abstract things; or be derided by  
A sort of battered kettle at the heel."<sup>1</sup>

The "battered kettle" is, of course, the fleshly body and the ageing powers which hampered him. At times he refers to them with even more passionate disgust. His heart, he says, is—

"sick with desire  
And fastened to a dying animal."

No doubt this fierce pride, with its disillusionment turned into a sort of haughty cynicism, transferred itself from the individual to

<sup>1</sup> *The Tower* (Macmillan).

the State. This with the distrust of liberalism and of commercial civilisation, helped to form his attitude to society—proud, anti-democratic and aristocratic. His work showed little sympathy with the cult of the primitive, however, and he never remained blind to the imperfections in Man's nature. Two lines which he wrote show an extraordinary understanding of the gap between intention and action, and even between intention and real motive.

"To do the right deed for the wrong reason" is "greatest treason," as Eliot points out, because inevitably the right deed then becomes the wrong one. This is how Yeats puts it:

"The best lack all conviction while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity."<sup>1</sup>

This shrewdness and clarity of perception kept him apart from the eulogy of Natural Man, and in particular of a rather primitive Natural Man, which we find in Lawrence and in the later Faulkner. Nor had he any sympathy for the Germanic mysticism which is seen in Stephan George and in Nazi poetry. It is a curiously Irish type of Natural Man that he presents to us. One that despises politics and takes an active part in them; one that admires blood and breeding and finds it in a blind beggar; one, we might almost say, that demands some imperfections in the perfect man. ~~It is of such a man, or something like him,~~ that he writes in one of his last and finest poems:

"It is time that I wrote my will;  
I choose upstanding men,  
That climb the streams until  
The fountain leap, and at dawn  
Drop their cast at the side  
Of dripping stone; I declare  
They shall inherit my pride,  
The pride of people that were  
Bound neither to Cause nor to State,  
Neither to slaves that were spat on,  
Nor to the tyrants that spat,  
The people of Burke and of Grattan  
That gave, though free to refuse."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The Second Coming," from *Collected Poems* (Macmillan).

<sup>2</sup> From *The Tower*.

*T. S. Eliot*

Excluding the work of such Christian, but minor, poets as Chesterton and Belloc, the first clear expression of the traditional view of the nature of Man appeared in "The Waste Land" (1922). At the time it must have seemed very like the similar view which was appearing in *Ulysses*—that of philosophy without a dogma, of Original Sin without redemption, of the Fall without the Atonement. Now, with Eliot's later work in mind, it is easy to see that this is not the case—Eliot did not at the time profess to be a Christian, but the full Christian doctrine of salvation as well as of sin is implicit in the thought of this poem.

Those who missed this in the early '20's may be excused, but a more serious misinterpretation was made by many readers who saw in the poem merely an expression of the cynicism and disillusionment which characterised much of the writing on Natural Man and which is seen in particular in the work of Noel Coward and the early Huxley. To them "The Waste Land" expressed "the disillusion of an age."

In this poem we are presented with Man as fallen, his society rotten at heart and crumbling, his pleasures corrupt, his spirit dead. But we are told no less forcibly of the need for spiritual rebirth. This is no place to go into the structure and symbolism of "The Waste Land," which need puzzle no one who takes the trouble to read *The Golden Bough*, and Miss Jessie Weston's book, *From Ritual to Romance*. It is sufficient to remind readers that Eliot takes the central story of the Grail legends—that of the Fisher King who is sick of the "dolorous" wound, whose land is waste and sterile, and who will not be cured nor the land made fertile till the Grail is brought to him. Eliot identifies the Fisher King with Attis and Adonis of classical mythology, and connects all three with the rituals performed to help the dying year to come to life and to give fertility to the fields. He then sees this modern world as a waste land, lacking the regenerating waters of the spirit.

His vision of the waste land takes many different forms—a varying landscape of desolation. At one time he describes it in words which suggest the Valley of Bones in Ezekiel:

"What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of Man,

You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
 A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
 And the dry stone no sound of water."<sup>1</sup>

This desert is described in traditional imagery, and by its biblical reference and the introduction of the "broken images" it suggests the decay of old religions and even of classical culture. The imagery is very like that of "The Hollow Men," a poem which followed "The Waste Land" in order of composition, but which represents an earlier stage in Eliot's spiritual development. For in "The Hollow Man" we have only the Fall, only the desolation, with no hope of the return of the spirit. The people of our present civilisation are seen as hollow, stuffed men, like the guys which boys burn on Bonfire Night. They are not so vicious as the characters of "The Waste Land," not so unutterably damned, but their case is even more hopeless. They represent the Limbo which precedes the Inferno of the longer poem, and the analogy is the more striking when we remember that the later verse, from "Ash Wednesday" onward, has the appearance of a *Purgatorio*. The landscape of "The Hollow Men" is very like the "Son of Man" passage quoted above, but it is less concrete; it has a dream quality and a slight flavour of nostalgia:

"This is the dead land  
 This is cactus land  
 Here the stone images  
 Are raised, here they receive  
 The supplication of a dead man's hand  
 Under the twinkle of a fading star."<sup>2</sup>

At another time the words deliberately recall Dante's Inferno:

"Unreal city,  
 Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
 I had not thought death had undone so many."<sup>3</sup>

Then the poetry has a Shakespearian ring, but immediately

<sup>1</sup> "The Waste Land," *Collected Poems* (Faber and Faber).

<sup>2</sup> "The Hollow Men," *Collected Poems*.

<sup>3</sup> "The Waste Land."

that is parodied and scoffed at. And we feel that the dry rot has got to the heart of this culture and that love has become hopeless. Even the lovers who have been evoked with the richness of Elizabethan English are waiting only for a knock on the door, for a return of the life-giving spirit:

"I remember

Those are pearls that were his eyes.

'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?'

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag."

This is followed by a passage where the lovers are by no means cultured, but the love is just as hopeless and sterile. Sex had its place as a holy ritual in the old Nature cults. The fertility of the soil and the fertility of the human stock were closely linked in the primitive mind, and to-day those who study the birth-rate are beginning to think that the fertility of human stock and the fertility of the human spirit may not be unconnected. But here is sex so debased and hopeless that its very aim is inverted—instead of being part of a fertility ritual, it becomes part of an infertility ritual:

"It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.

(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)

The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the same.

You *are* a proper fool, I said.

Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,

What you get married for if you don't want children?"

The speech rhythms of this section are given a twisting vitality which is achieved by no other modern poet. The voices clang together in this public-house on the borders of Hell, and the barman continually reminds you of the inevitable passing of time. This is repeated later in words which echo the "Time's wingèd chariot" of Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress":

"But at my back from time to time I hear

The sound of horns and motors which shall bring  
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring."

The story of barren love is repeated in the episode of the typist and the "small house-agent's clerk":

"Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:  
 'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.' "

In the middle section of the poem the waste land is described in imagery taken from our modern industrial civilisation. Now the waters of the spirit have become fouled. Instead of the Sweet Thames of Spenser's day or the waters of Babylon of the Psalmist, we have this scene:

"A rat crept softly through the vegetation  
 Dragging its slimy belly on the bank  
 While I was fishing in the dull canal  
 On a winter evening round behind the gashouse."

So far this is entirely a picture of desolation. But in the final section of the poem the thunder speaks and the thunder is the voice of God. The thunder speaks in Hindustani: "*Datta, dayadhvam, damyata*"—Give, sympathise, control. And then the clouds come, bringing rain.



In his later poetry, Eliot has been concerned more with the words of the thunder, in a Christian rather than a Buddhist context. He has so completely assimilated into his thought the Christian doctrine of Man that there is no need for him to talk about it. There are two later expressions of it which need attention, however. The first is in *Triumphal March*. When this poem appeared it was misunderstood by some critics to be fascist. It tells of a crowd waiting for their leader, for the saviour of the world. It is an ordinary mixed, restless crowd, waiting in a city which is both the classical and the modern world. They see first of all the heavy procession of the inhuman mechanised army:

"5,800,000 rifles and carbines,  
 102,000 machine guns,  
 28,000 trench mortars,  
 53,000 field and heavy guns,  
 I cannot tell how many projectiles, mines and fuses."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Triumphal March* (Faber and Faber).



Then the petty officials, the Mayor and Livery Men, the golf-club captains, the Scouts. Then at last the leader. But he is not a saviour, only a Cæsar, and—

"There is no interrogation in those eyes."

In the end the people are left waiting as were those in "The Waste Land" for the return of the spirit, but here it is seen in a symbol not of water but of fire:

“Please will you

Give us a light?

## Light

Light."

No doubt this poem implies that the people are waiting and ready to respond to leadership, but there is no glorification of the leader. Instead he is seen as an ordinary human being, subject to the usual temptations and moral struggle.

The second example is in *The Family Reunion*, where it appears among other themes. Before the play opened, Harry was married, but his wife fell off the deck of a liner at sea and was drowned. From that time he has been obsessed with the idea that he had pushed her off, and his consciousness of guilt had followed him in the shape of the Furies, the Eumenides. He flies from them all over the world, but cannot escape them, and at last returns to his home, hoping that he will find refuge in the surroundings of his childhood. But the Eumenides pursue him even here. Among the collection of uncles and aunts (a very dull lot from the dramatic point of view) who are at the family house is Agatha, a spinster and principal of a woman's college, who as a girl had been in love with Harry's father and he with her. She tells Harry that just before he was born his father had planned to murder his mother. It becomes clear then that this is the beginning of the family curse which has haunted Harry, and that the wish of his father had been the cause of his obsession with a similar sin. He begins to see that he may not have murdered his wife at all:

*“Harry:*

## Perhaps

I only dreamt I pushed her.

"*Agatha*: So I had supposed. What of it?"

What we have written is not a story of detection,

Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation.  
 It is possible that you have not known what sin  
 You shall expiate, or whose, or why. It is certain  
 That the knowledge of it must precede the expiation.  
 It is possible that sin may strain and struggle  
 In its dark instinctive birth, to come to consciousness  
 And so find expurgation. It is possible  
 You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,  
 Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame."<sup>1</sup>

And now Harry begins to understand that it is no use for him to flee from the Eumenides—indeed, the very place in which he had hoped to escape them is more than any other the place where they have always been. They appear once more in the window and Harry greets them:

“ . . . and this time  
 You cannot think that I am surprised to see you.  
 And you shall not think that I am afraid to see you.  
 This time, you are real, this time, you are outside me,  
 And just endurable.”

He now knows not only that it is useless to flee from the Eumenides, but that it is needless. His fate is not one to escape from; it is one to be met and faced. When this is done the Eumenides are no longer terrible—they are “the bright angels.” He is now ready to leave home again and follow where the Eumenides may lead him, even though it means hardship, self-sacrifice, and self-control:

“ . . . the worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation,  
 A stony sanctuary and a primitive altar,  
 The heat of the sun and the icy vigil,  
 A care over the lives of humble people,  
 The lesson of ignorance, of incurable diseases.”

Of the many interpretations which can be given of the family curse the central one seems to me that of Original Sin. I do not say it is the best or the only one, because I do not think there is a best or only one, but it is central, and only with it in mind can we fully understand the others. It is obvious that a purely legalistic interpretation (visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children)

<sup>1</sup> *The Family Reunion* (Faber and Faber).

is not sufficient, nor a Freudian, which would explain it as a discovery of unsuspected inhibitions. It is rather that Harry, in learning the nature of his father, has learned also his own nature and that of Man. For Harry is not really haunted by the memory of a sin which he did not commit. Instead, he had his part in his father's sin, and he had willed to commit the same sin and to that extent had committed it in intention. His father was not guiltless merely because Agatha persuaded him not to commit murder. Nor is Harry guiltless. The obsession that he had murdered his wife was not just a result of a feeling of guilt, it was guilt in itself, for there was desire in it as well as conscience.



A predominant theme in Eliot's later work is the relation of time to eternity, or the apprehension of eternity through time, especially in so far as this may be perceived in the Incarnation and, similarly, in the Mass. This has been studied by other<sup>1</sup> writers, and I do not want to deal with it here.

Closely connected with it, however, is another which has been of great importance in nearly all his work, increasingly so in the later work, and which, because of its moral significance, is related to the subject of this book. This theme occurs in three forms: firstly, the need for the purgation of the will; secondly, the need for the soul to divest "itself of the love of created beings"; thirdly, the aim to arrive at the experience of the Divine by the rejection of images, i.e. the Negative Way. Actually, the second and third forms are in effect only different aspects of the first form in its widest implications.

The problem of the subjugation of the individual will to the will of God is given in its simplest and most forcible form in *Murder in the Cathedral*. The "plot" of the play, the question which remains undecided in the minds of the audience until the action solves it, is not whether Becket will stick to his guns and allow himself to be martyred. We know this from history. We know that the knights

<sup>1</sup> Of particular interest are Helen Gardner on "The Recent Poetry of T. S. Eliot" in *New Writing and Daylight*, Summer, 1942 (Hogarth Press), and M. C. Bradbrook on "The Latest Verse of T. S. Eliot" in *Theology*, February, 1942 (S.P.C.K.). The reader might also consult "T. S. Eliot's Rose Garden," by Leonard Unger, in *The Southern Review*, Spring, 1942 (Louisiana State University), but this is not easily accessible for the English reader, and its provision of a Beatrice for Mr. Eliot and a mystical moment in the rose garden during childhood is, to say the least, speculative.

will not scare him. We know that he will not succumb to the temptations of sensual pleasure, of temporal and political power. We know that he will not forsake his Church. But what we do not know until Thomas himself tells us is whether or not he was a martyr in spirit as well as one in body. No doubt much of the popularity of *Murder in the Cathedral* was due to its being interpreted by a large part of the audience as a picture of a man who stood up for his conscience against odds, a truly Protestant and English martyr. But this, of course, is to miss the point. Yet the point is made clear enough. The third tempter states it plainly:

“Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest  
On earth, to be high in heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

To Thomas that is a very real temptation, but he overcomes it. In his Christmas Day sermon he says:

“A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. It is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr.”

It is in the light of these words that we should read those passages in the *Burnt Norton* series which have seemed to some readers to be unnecessarily hopeless or even defeatist:

“I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love  
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith  
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.”<sup>2</sup>

The need for the soul to “divest itself of the love of created beings” was stated in *Sweeney Agonistes*, where this quotation from St. John of the Cross is placed at the head of the work. The idiom is not that of the contemplative life, but of jazz, and the speakers are Sweeney, Klipstein, Krumpacker, Doris, Dusty and others of the strange creatures who move about in the suburbs of the Waste Land:

<sup>1</sup> *Murder in the Cathedral* (Faber and Faber).

<sup>2</sup> *East Coker* (Faber and Faber).

- "Sweeney: You see this egg  
 Well that's life on a crocodile isle.  
 There's no telephones  
 There's no gramophones  
 There's no motor-cars  
 No two-seaters, no six-seaters,  
 No Citroën, no Rolls-Royce.  
 Nothing to eat but the fruit as it grows.  
 Nothing to see but the palm-trees one way  
 And the sea the other way,  
 Nothing to hear but the sound of the surf.  
 Nothing at all but three things.
- "Doris: What things?
- "Sweeney: Birth, and copulation, and death.  
 That's all, that's all, that's all, that's all.  
 Birth, and copulation, and death.
- "Doris: I'd be bored.
- "Sweeney: "You'd be bored.  
 Birth, and copulation, and death."<sup>1</sup>

Later the theme was to take a more penitential shape. At the third purgatorial stair of "Ash Wednesday" we have the memory of the sensual pleasures of youth:

"Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,  
 Lilac and brown hair."

The lilac image arises also among the temptations of Becket:

"The purple bullfinch in the lilac tree."

Temptation passed, the theme takes a more ascetic shape, either as in the passage already quoted from *The Family Reunion*, which reminds us of the Desert Fathers as well as of modern missionaries, or as in Part IV of *East Coker*. In the latter Eliot writes in a rather seventeenth-century style of the world as a hospital in which "to be restored, our sickness must grow worse," and links the suffering of mankind with the redemptive suffering of Christ and with the Mass:

"If to be warmed, then I must freeze  
 And quake in frigid purgatorial fires  
 Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sweeney Agonistes* (Faber and Faber).

<sup>2</sup> *East Coker*.

There is no escaping these, no way out:

"The only hope, or else despair  
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—  
To be redeemed from fire by fire."<sup>1</sup>

One is tempted to ask is Eliot American or is he American, but there is no doubt about his belief and the firmness with which he holds it. It may be, indeed, that this asceticism results in the curious deliberate dryness which occasionally attacks his later poetry. It is as if every now and then he feels constrained to put aside all sensual appeal of image, all musical appeal of word and rhythm. Then he retreats into this sort of thing:

"That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory:  
A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,  
Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle  
With words and meanings."<sup>2</sup>

I do not imply that such passages are ineffective or that they do not have their part in the structure of the verse, but they sound as if Eliot were putting himself on bread and water so far as poetry is concerned. Hopkins faced a similar problem. In him it caused long periods of abstention from composition, with the resulting gush and splash about his verses when at last he let his fancy flow.

The Negative Way was in its origin a method of arriving at truth by a systematic rejection of the false. The human intellect could not guess at the positive attributes of God; therefore it tried to define them by deciding what He was not. Later this was adapted by Christian mystics as a way of arriving at experience of the Godhead by the rejection of all things which were not God, i.e. the rejection of all images, analogies, all human conceptions, and the rejection of the will, even the will to attain to that experience. In the *Burnt Norton* poems this is expressed by a series of paradoxes. *East Coker* is constructed around the motto of Mary Queen of Scots:

"In my beginning is my end."

*Little Gidding* puts it this way:

"The end is where we start from";

<sup>1</sup> *Little Gidding* (Faber and Faber).

<sup>2</sup> *East Coker*.

and again:

“And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started.”

In the middle section of *East Coker* the imagery is taken mainly from light and darkness:

“So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing,”

and the last words glance at a figure who has been cropping up continually during Eliot's later poetry, “the still centre of the turning world.” In *East Coker*, too, the paradoxes are placed together so deliberately, even cheekily, that they have a nursery-rhyme effect:

“In order to arrive at what you do not know  
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.  
In order to possess what you do not possess  
You must go by the way of dispossession.  
In order to arrive at what you are not  
You must go through the way in which you are not.  
And what you do not know is the only thing you know  
And what you own is what you do not own  
And where you are is where you are not.”

Paradox is used so often in these poems that it is becoming dangerously like a mannerism. I do not wish to grumble at what seems to me the finest poetry written in our time, but I would hope that paradox has now played its part in Eliot's verse, as well as the new, rather irritating habit of apologising for repeating himself.

Nevertheless, the paradox is not just a trick; it is part of the penitential trend of Eliot's thought. The danger of it, and the danger of the whole of the Negative Way, is that pursued to its logical end it would demand the rejection of poetry, which might be good for Eliot, but would certainly be bad for poetry.

*W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis, etc.*

The generation which followed Eliot (i.e. who followed the “Waste Land”) devoted itself largely to the expression in poetry

of political hopes and plans. If it were insisted that I should define their attitude to Man in the terms of this book, I should say that they held a mixture or combination of the doctrines of Liberal and Natural Man; they looked to Liberal Man to achieve a society in which Natural Man could live. But it is not a very useful form of criticism to force everything into its prescribed pigeon-hole.

It was characteristic of these poets, however, that they expected all problems to be solved by the reform of society. This was expressed in various ways. On the surface Auden was the most Marxist. His early poetry is full of warnings of the inevitable catastrophe which was in store for the bourgeois. His characters were forever playing at Boy Scouts. They went out to patrol no-man's-land, or to explore the unmapped valley. They were exhorted to be courageous, to be rash, to be ruthless. There was expectancy and suspense in all their movements:

“Look there! The sunk road winding  
To the fortified farm.  
Listen! The cock's alarm  
In the strange valley.”<sup>1</sup>

At other times he derided the present-day society as decadent and moribund. His verse has great vigour, and its colloquial language and everyday imagery give force to his sarcasm:

“Shut up talking, charming in the best suits to be had in town,  
Lecturing on navigation while the ship is going down.  
Drop those priggish ways for ever, stop behaving like a stone:  
Throw the bath-chairs right away, and learn to leave ourselves  
alone.  
If we really want to live, we'd better start at once to try;  
If we don't, it doesn't matter, but we'd better start to die.”<sup>2</sup>

Auden did not often try to picture the Utopia of the future, and when he does his verse is flat and unconvincing, but by its use of concrete images it does avoid the vagueness and pretentiousness of most Pelagian poetry:

<sup>1</sup> From *Poems* (Faber and Faber).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



"To-morrow for the young, the poets exploding like bombs,  
The walks by the lake, the weeks of perfect communion;  
To-morrow the bicycle races  
Through the suburbs on summer evenings. But to-day the  
struggle."<sup>1</sup>

The bombs are something of a damp squib, but the bicycle races are a happy idea—though not, perhaps, for the pedestrians!

Day Lewis was less successful in his hymning of the future. He was so fascinated by the discovery that imagery taken from the industrial scene could have a stimulating and even romantic effect that he overworks it:

"O there's a mine of metal,  
Enough to make me rich  
And build right over chaos  
A cantilever bridge."<sup>2</sup>

Such an analogy is already curiously dated. At other times his exuberance becomes comic, "gasometers rise" as a sign of joy and spring and new life.

Stephen Spender represented the true liberal as distinct from the Marxist tradition. When he tried to write in a "proletarian" manner he was apt to fall with a bump into an anticlimax or even bathos:

"Death is another milestone on their way.  
With laughter on their lips and with winds blowing round them  
They record simply  
How this one excelled all others in making driving belts."<sup>3</sup>

In most of these early poems Spender puts into modern idiom the aspirations of a nineteenth century liberal. The poems are burningly sincere, and they have a brightness and freshness of language which makes them most attractive, but their sentiments have been heard many times before in electioneering speeches and latitudinarian sermons:

<sup>1</sup> *Spain* (Faber and Faber).

<sup>2</sup> "The Magnetic Mountain."

<sup>3</sup> "The Funeral," from *Poems* (Faber and Faber).

"We have come at last to a country  
 Where light equal, like the shine from snow, strikes all faces,  
 Here you may wonder  
 How it was that works, money, interest, building could ever  
 hide  
 The palpable and obvious love of man for man."<sup>1</sup>

Even when the theme is less political there are still the same liberal aspirations at the heart of it. "Those who were truly great" are the zealots, the reformers, the believers in brotherhood:

"Born of the sun they travelled a short while towards the sun,  
 And left the vivid air signed with their honour."

In the later work of these three poets we find a very significant change of outlook. The same is apparent in the work of Michael Roberts and to a lesser extent of John Lehmann, though in their case it is to be seen more obviously in their criticism than in their poetry. The other poets of the "New Signatures" group were mostly unable to adapt themselves to the change, and they dropped out of the race. Louis MacNeice joined the survivors, but he was always an individualist and never was able to raise much enthusiasm for the political programmes to which he seemed to be allied.

Signs of the change came from Auden, the first hint being the "Letter to Lord Byron" in *Letters from Iceland*. It was not so much the content of this poem which was significant as its form and its affinity to the later work of Byron. (Byron was never a Pelagian, like Shelley and Godwin. Perhaps as a result of his upbringing in Scotland, he retained a strain of Calvinism in his thought: the romantic twist was given by his regarding himself as one of the predestined damned instead of one of the predestined elect.) Next, Auden went to China with Christopher Isherwood, and the result was *Journey to a War*, where Auden's most important contribution was the series of sonnets which range in subject from the Fall to the Sino-Japanese War. The opening sonnets are particularly notable. That which begins—

"They wondered why the fruit had been forbidden;  
 It taught them nothing new,"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Poems* (Faber and Faber).

<sup>2</sup> *Journey to a War* (Faber and Faber).

shows a fine intuitive understanding of the moral problem involved in the Fall. C. S. Lewis has pointed out<sup>1</sup> that the fruit was forbidden, not because it had any special qualities in itself, not because it held any secrets or gave any knowledge, but merely because it was to be a test of obedience. The sin of Adam and Eve was not in their seeking to become super-human, but merely in their disobeying God, in their setting up their own will against the will of God. This also seems to be Auden's view. And the effects of sin are enumerated in the sonnet with precision. They lost the sense of brotherhood with the animals; they lost the sense of sympathy with creation; they were alien in the world:

“ . . . they could not understand  
The dogs now who, before, had always aided;  
The stream was dumb with whom they'd always planned.”

They were puzzled and unhappy, “freedom was so wild.” Maturity receded from them “like a horizon from a child.” And that which is lost could not be recaptured or restored by the dreamer or planner, for—

“ . . . the way back by angels was defended  
Against the poet and the legislator.”

In *New Year Letter*, the Fall is again commented on, this time not in the traditional symbol of Eden, but in the imagery of a landscape which Auden made peculiarly his own in his earlier verse:

“Whenever I begin to think  
About the human creature we  
Must nurse to sense and decency,  
An English area comes to mind,  
I see the native of my kind  
As a locality I love,  
The limestone moors that stretch from Brough  
To Hexham and the Roman Wall,  
There is my symbol of us all.

<sup>1</sup> In *Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford).

There, where the Eden leisures through  
 Its sandstone valley, is my view  
 Of green and civil life that dwells  
 Below a cliff of savage fells  
 From which original address  
 Man faulted into consciousness."<sup>1</sup>

The last line is worth notice. Together with the mythical tone of the sonnets, it suggests that in Auden's mind Eden has been pushed so far back into Man's pre-history that it can scarcely be held to have existed at all. Man had always been a fallen creature, for if he had to be unconscious to be innocent his innocence was not very real. This is a point of view which is probably reaction from the Utopian outlook of the generation among which Auden grew up.

But Auden has now no Utopian delusions:

"... wishes are not horses: this  
 Annus is not mirabilis;  
 Day breaks upon the world we know  
 Of war and wastefulness and woe,  
 Ashamed civilians come to grief  
 In brotherhoods without belief,  
 Whose good intentions cannot cure  
 The actual evils they endure."

Good intentions alone will get us nowhere. Most people—have good intentions, most—

"... know  
 Instinctively what ought to be  
 The nature of society  
 And how they'd live there if they could,  
 If it were easy to be good."

The political problems are still there. The need for political thought and action is still there. But Auden has now seen that political problems have roots deeper than the level of society, that good intentions and well-planned politics go wrong, because there is some unsolved problem in the human heart. Planning is of little use if unregenerate *ego* is ignored:

<sup>1</sup> *New Year Letter* (Faber and Faber).

“Up in the Ego’s atmosphere  
And higher altitudes of fear  
The particles of error form  
The shepherd-killing thunderstorm  
And our political distress  
Descends from her self-consciousness.”

*New Year Letter* is written in octosyllabic couplets, the metre of *Hudibras*. It is a witty poem, but somewhat dry and lacking the evocative quality of Auden’s earlier poetry, where he was continually raising the common objects of modern civilisation to a higher symbolic significance. This quality appears, however, in the sonnet sequence which ends the book. The letter had been diagnosis; this is a temperature chart of man’s struggle for salvation. It is not without hope. Auden sees grace in Alice’s vision of Wonderland as well as in religion and philosophy. He comments ironically on some of the more extreme methods as those of the Desert Fathers:

“Spinning upon their central thirst like tops  
They went the Negative Way toward the Dry;  
By empty caves beneath an empty sky  
They emptied out their memories like slops”;

and he is suspicious of the ready-made advice of the sciences. He notices that the more successful follower is often a very ordinary man, who does not deal with vague aspirations, but is—

“... always glad to mow the grass,  
Pour liquids from large bottles into small,  
Or look at clouds through bits of coloured glass.”

And in the Epilogue he concludes with words which are astonishingly like those we had come to expect from Eliot:

“Nevertheless,  
Whatever the situation and the blame,  
Let the lips do formal contrition  
For whatever is going to happen,

Time remembered bear witness to time required,  
The positive and negative ways through time  
Embrace and encourage each other  
In a brief moment of intersection."

Much the same problem is seen in the work of Edwin Muir, a poet of a generation rather older than Auden's. Muir is often concerned with predestination and free-will. Sometimes he seems to stand apart from human history, an observer outside time, and record events in a chronicle which is preordained and repetitive:

"The secret on the appointed day  
Will be made known, the ship once more  
Hit upon the waiting rock  
Or come safely to the shore."<sup>1</sup>

Such is a view which may be possible to the intellect in a moment of isolation, but it is not a view we can live by. The heart knows that in the process of living we must believe in free-will and choice, and it replies:

"This is only what the eye  
From the tower on the turning field  
Sees and sees and cannot tell why,  
Quarterings on the turning shield,  
The great non-stop heraldic show.  
And the heart and the mind know,  
What has been can never return."

Man, then, in Muir's poetry has the power of choice, but he is shut in by his limitations. It is indeed a "narrow place" with great stretches of time beyond the mountains which he cannot pass. Yet he can still see visions, and Muir's visions are expressed in superb heraldic imagery and with no waste of words:

"Hell shoots his avalanche at our feet,  
In heaven the souls go up and down,  
And we can see from this our seat  
The heavenly and the hellish town,

<sup>1</sup> *The Narrow Place* (Faber and Faber).

The green cross growing in a wood  
 Close by old Eden's crumbling wall,  
 And God himself in full manhood  
 Riding against the Fall."

Few of Auden's contemporaries consider the problem so philosophically, but the change of outlook is shown in a greater depth of sympathy in the maturer work of Spender and Day Lewis. There is a feeling for the personal values in the poems of *Ruins and Visions*<sup>1</sup> which is far more moving than the humanitarianism of the earlier poems. Day Lewis, too, leaves behind the jauntiness of *The Magnetic Mountain* and sees politics more vividly in terms of human lives and suffering:

"I watch when searchlights set the low cloud smoking  
 Like acid on metal: I start  
 At sirens, sweat to feel a whole town wince  
 And thump, a terrified heart,  
 Under the bomb-strokes. These, to look back on, are  
 A few hours' unreprieve:  
 But the roofless old, the child beneath the débris—  
 How can I speak for those?"<sup>2</sup>

And, continuing, he expresses a new realisation that in the long run it is the individual with which politics is concerned, and that the problems of society are the problems of the human soul writ large:

"Busy the preachers, the politicians weaving  
 Voluble charms around  
 This ordeal, conjuring a harvest that shall spring from  
 Our heart's all-harrowed ground."

### *The Younger Poets*

I wish now to consider the youngest generation of all, the "under 30's" (though date of birth is not really important), the poets who have emerged since 1939. A good deal has been written about them and a good many generalisations have been

<sup>1</sup> See also *Life and the Poet*, by Stephen Spender (Routledge).

<sup>2</sup> "Word Over All," in *New Writing and Daylight*, Winter, 1942-3 (Hogarth Press).

made. It does not seem to me to be very useful to make generalisations. These poets are not a job-lot. They do not form a "school"; they do not subscribe to any poetic formula or doctrine. One clear group has arisen among them—the New Apocalypse—but there are many outside this group. The Apocalypse includes Henry Treece, J. F. Hendry, Dylan Thomas and Nicholas Moore. It derives from symbolism and is purely literary in its aims—so far as I can see, a poet could be an Apocalyptic if he wanted to whatever philosophy of life he might hold. Nevertheless, in its emphasis on the value of imaginative experience it is a reaction against scientific materialism.

Of the rest, some are pacifist, some not; some Christian, some not; some pacifist and Christian, some neither. Yet they have characteristics in common. It has been said, for instance, that they are part of a new romanticism. I admire such critics and poets as Herbert Read, Henry Treece, and Alex Comfort, who hold that point of view, but I think "romantic" is a dangerous and misleading word, and that the traits which make some (and by no means all) of these poets seem romantic may be transient and the result of peculiar conditions.

Through the work of most of them runs a feeling of guilt, and a consciousness of responsibility to the generations of the future. There is little vague talk of a new world, but rather a fear that the indolence and selfishness which caused the present catastrophe may have compromised the future for us already. Alan Rook, himself an active soldier, expresses it finely in his poem which was written at Dunkirk:

"What hope for the future? Can we who see the tide  
ebbing along the shore, the greedy, lined  
with shadows, dare with puny words support  
a future which belongs to others? Dare we bind  
  
now, at this last moment of sunshine above  
the crests of oncoming events, like waves which move  
remorselessly nearer, future generations  
with sacrifice? *We* who taught hate, expect them to love?"<sup>1</sup>

And Anne Ridler puts it in her prim, precise way, after speaking first of the wars of the Plantagenet times:

<sup>1</sup> *Soldiers, This Solitude* (Routledge).



"For us, who by proxy inflicted gross oppression,  
 Among whom the humblest have some sins of omission,  
 War is not simple; in more or less degree  
 All are guilty, 'though some will suffer unjustly.  
 Can we say mass to dedicate our bombs?  
 Yet those earlier English, for all their psalms,  
 Were marauders, had less provocation than we,  
 While the causes of war were as mixed and hard to see."<sup>1</sup>

David Gascoyne identifies the suffering of the nations with that of Christ:

"He is suspended on the cross-tree now  
 And we are onlookers at the crime,  
 Callous contemporaries of the slow  
 Torture of God."<sup>2</sup>

Turning from the modern industrialised civilisation, many of the poets find some consolation in the pleasures of the natural world. It is a rather sad pleasure, as if they were looking their "last on all things lovely" for reasons very different from those of Mr. de la Mare. Thus Alun Lewis, after a wet day in an Army camp:

"And I can remember nothing dearer or more to my heart  
 Than the children I watched in the woods on Saturday  
 Shaking down burning chestnuts for the school-yard's merry  
 play,  
 Or the shaggy patient dog who followed me  
 Through Sheet and Steep and up the wooded scree  
 To the Shoulder o' Mutton where Edward Thomas brooded  
 long  
 On death and beauty—till a bullet stopped his song."<sup>3</sup>

And Alex Comfort, addressing a friend in the Army, writes:

"Whether the haws grow red, or Christmas trees  
 green with their own spring candles watch the Rhine  
 your hour marches, knowing  
 the clod's lip not distant."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Now as Then," quoted from *An Anthology of Religious Verse* (Penguin).

<sup>2</sup> "Miserere," quoted from *Poetry in Wartime* (Faber and Faber).

<sup>3</sup> *Raiders' Dawn* (Allen & Unwin).

<sup>4</sup> *A Wreath for the Living* (Routledge).

poets have not considered their philosophical  
 old, probably accept intellectually the doctrine  
 as set out in the two earlier sections of this  
 I believe there is a new humility, and new  
 is an imperfect, sinful, dependent being; that  
 ics, however necessary and important, are not  
 gh. This does not lead to pessimism; instead, it  
 love and friendship, to the pleasures of the  
 e achievements of simple lives. It even gives  
 . We find this especially in the verse of Anne  
 the future is greater than that of the politician  
 rs is that of the mother who gives a new child  
 which is based in Christian doctrine and a  
 as its roots in Christian marriage she says to

le honey, then; sleep while the powers  
 ne Bright Shiners and the Seven Stars  
 encircle: the natural world  
 , neutral, unless despoiled  
 ed or scorn. And wherever you sleep—  
 outgrown—or waking weep,  
 ur lot: you lie in God's hand,  
 rible mercy, world without end.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Dream Observed* (P.L. Pamphlets).

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